

# CLAWS OF THE THUNDERBIRD



BY HOLLING C. HOLLING



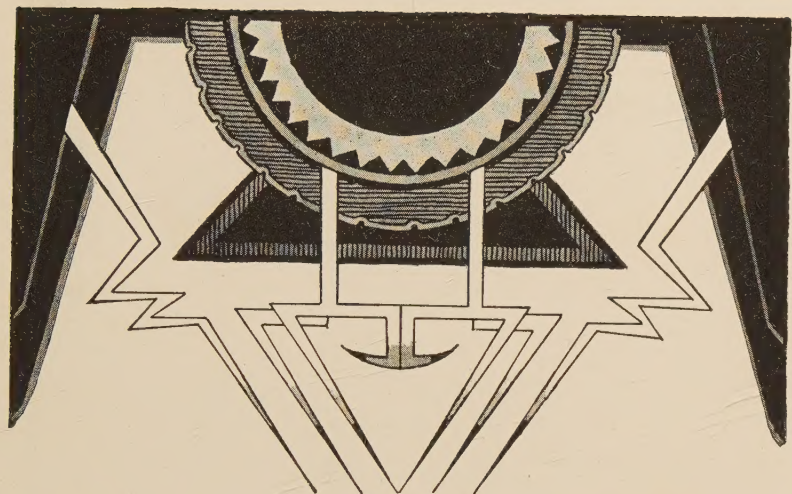












CLAWS  
OF THE  
THUNDERBIRD



*This is one of  
The Volland Adventure Series*

*Another title is  
"The Pirate's Treasure"*

*Written and Illustrated by  
Edward A. Wilson*





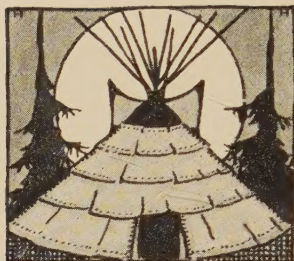
CLAWS  
OF THE  
THUNDERBIRD  
A TALE OF THREE LOST INDIANS

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED  
BY  
HOLLING CLANCY HOLLING



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*To my brother, Allen.  
May we have many exploring  
trips together.*



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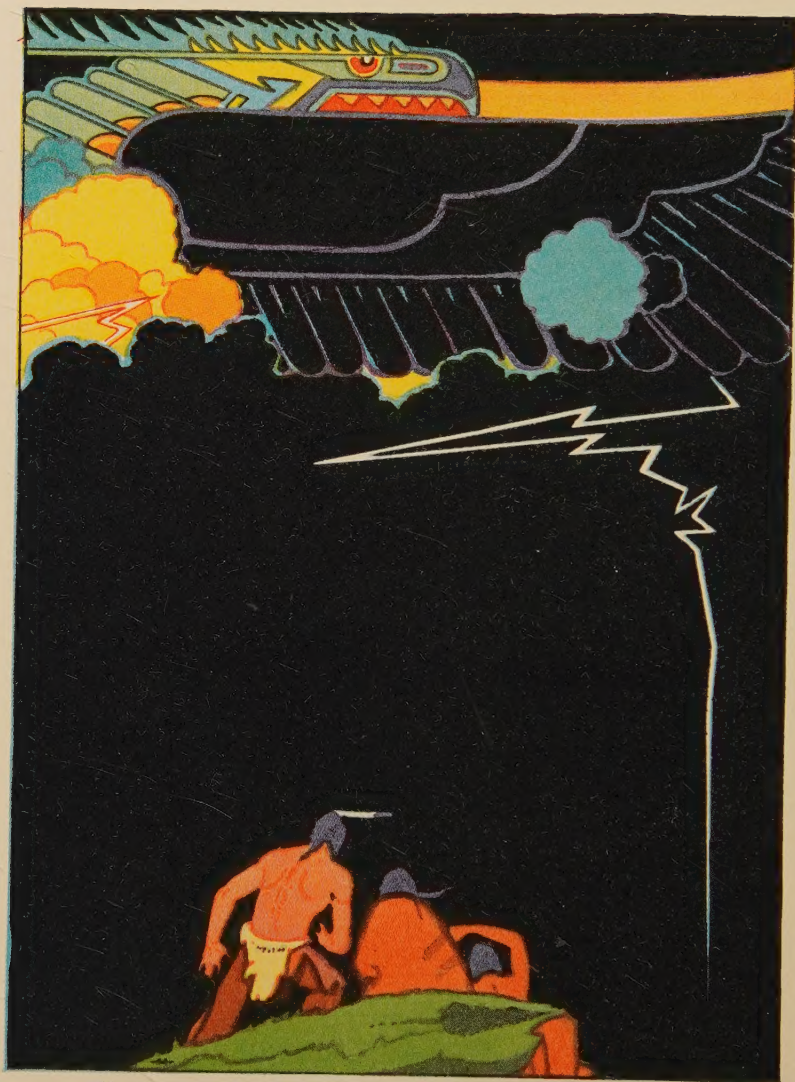
## Claws of the Thunderbird

### *To the Reader*

All this happened many, many summers ago, before the heeled boot of the white man crunched the sanded shores of Kitchi Gami, Lake Superior. Then the trails were run by soft moccasins that made no sound. Then no bark of rifles disturbed the woods, and deer and moose went to their deaths heralded only by the twang of bowstring and the hiss of feathered shaft. The smoke of coal fires spread no haze against the sun in those days, nor was there steel for knives, nor yellow lumber for houses. Copper there was, and stone and bone and flint, and with these four things the Chippewa and the Sioux made weapons and hurled defiance, one at the other, across the forests and the plains.

If you look at a map, you may see Lake Superior, the Great Water, lying with his tail in Minnesota where now stands Duluth, with Superior, Wisconsin, on the opposite shore and a long sand island between. I have been told that long ago a battle once took place here. I do not know. But now there are tall





*There are those who have seen the Thunderbird.*

factories footing the red cliffs, and huge steel ships plowing the back of Kitchi Gami, nor are they at all disturbed when the Thunderbird spreads his wings and blinks forth his lightning. But in those many summers past there were only bark wigwams along the sand, and fragile craft of birch upon the water, and the Thunderbird, that great Spirit of the Upper Air, was a very real thing.

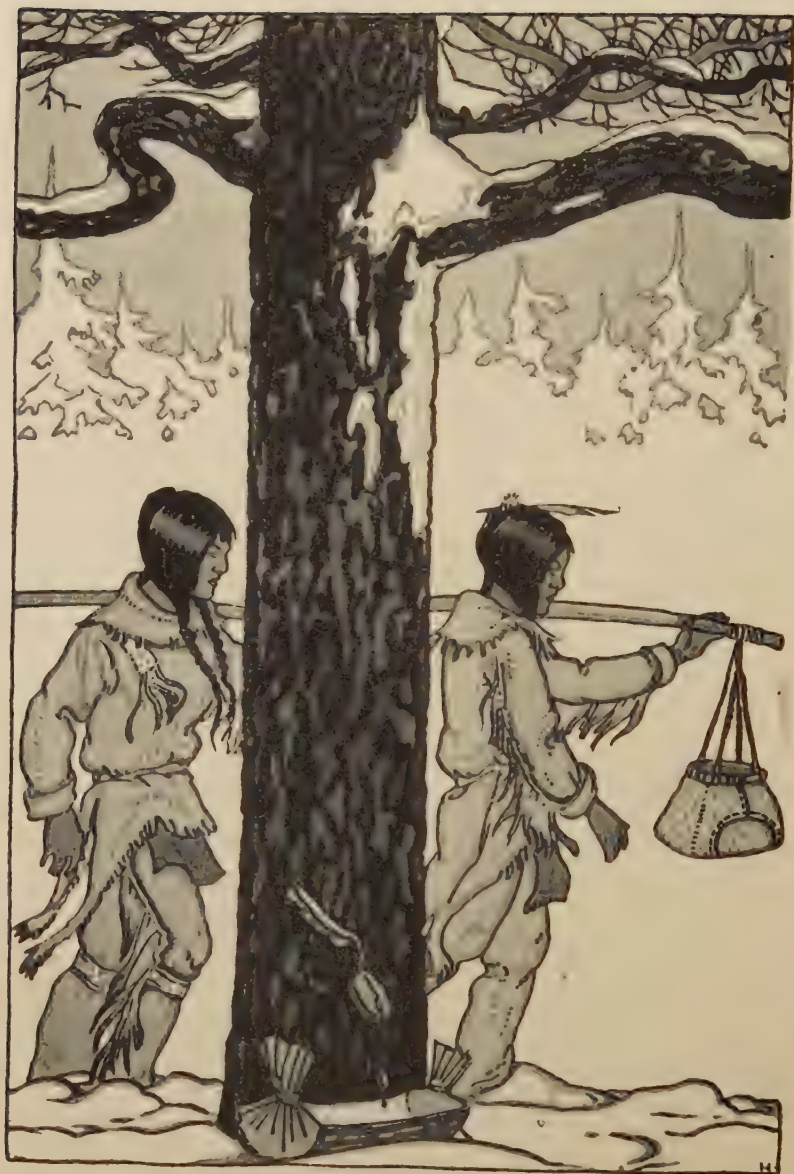
I do not know. I have been told by a Chippewa, who got it from his uncle, whose father was a learned man and remembered what his mother taught him—that what happened in this story took place west of Duluth. Some say that the bay behind the sand island is carpeted with Bwanoz bones. I have a Sioux friend who laughs heartily at this. I do not know.

There are others who say there was once a great battle fought, as I have said, but when and where it was, nobody seems to agree. Yet, when the fire has sunk to slumbering coals and the memories of old men wander along the misted trails, they will tell you that it was a great battle, a great battle, indeed!

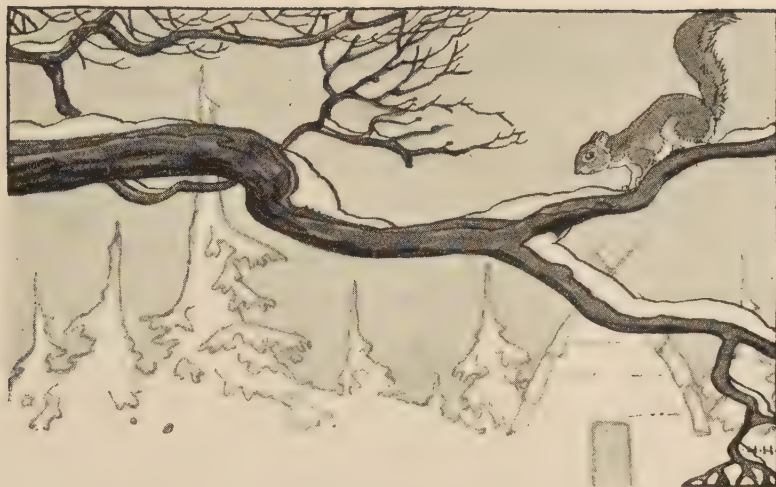
I have never seen the Thunderbird, but there are those who have, for they will tell you so. And when the thunder roars, and the loose bark flaps on the wigwam roof in the gale, and the rain seeks every opening, and forked lightning seethes in the black night—then are the old women watchful, and the old men remember strange tales. Then, for them, the Thunderbird flies once more!

Perhaps the Thunderbird is still awake? I do not know——





*"This is no life for a Chippewa warrior."*



## CHAPTER ONE

"This is no life for a Chippewa warrior!" ejaculated Olah while laboring under two birch buckets of maple sap. The pole across his shoulders hurt a little, and no self-respecting Indian lad, twelve or more, enjoys toil supposed to be done by girls. "I don't like this work!" he finished.

"Nor do I," replied Bopo, his cousin and best friend, scuffling through the March snow from tree to tree. Three days before, they had eagerly assisted at the gashing of the trunks, the fitting of the bark cups beneath each gash, and the cutting and hauling of wood to keep the huge clay pots bubbling. They had been first of the sugar camp to pour a ladleful of the thick syrup, sputtering on the white snow, to cool into candy, and much of the first golden sugar went, not into the bark makaks for storage, but into



their mouths. However, the second day had seen them rather slow to eat much of it, and now the very thought of sugar, syrup, or sap made them ill. Moreover, now that they had been more than satisfied, the prospect of a continual grind of woodcutting and sap-carrying did not at all appeal.

"There are a dozen children to do this work," continued Bopo, pointing to where small forms clad in yellow buckskin romped among the bare tree trunks, "and no need of grown fellows like us. Magpie there can oversee them. Let's go squirrel hunting!"

"It does stand to reason that Magpie could do our work," agreed Olah, letting the buckets down carefully and rubbing his shoulder. "She isn't half out of breath with what she does do. She can talk a green streak while she gathers sap, and if she didn't waste so much breath she could do twice as much work. It really is criminal for us to listen to her."

"Come on, let's go squirrel hunting!" tempted Bopo once more. "I saw three plump ones all in one tree, and that's good medicine!"

"They really wouldn't miss us," agreed Olah, thoughtful again, "but what of Aunt Otter Woman? It might be bad medicine to sneak out after she told us not to go hunting. You know what she said this morning."

"Oh, yes, I know! She and Pine Cone are forever telling us that tale about the terrible Bwanoz, the Sioux, being in the sugar territory at this time. I

know it by heart. Pine Cone lost her husband and papoose, one spring at the sugar camp, and she's been nearly a crazy woman ever since. And this year all the Chippewa men are away on the fur hunt, and we are the only protectors of the camp, and so on and so on. But that's the way with Aunt Otter Woman, always afraid, just like a woman. *I* don't think there are any Bwanoz within a hundred miles of here, and anyway we wouldn't be gone *long*. Just a little hunt wouldn't hurt."

"Well, maybe just a little hunt wouldn't be very bad," said Olah relenting. "Just a *little* hunt, say over that ridge and down the swamp. But we'll have a *time* of it, sneaking our bows out the back way."

So into the wig-was-i-gamig, the high birch bark wigwam, they walked, setting their buckets in line near the huge earthen pot bubbling in the center. They said nothing, and passed out the back way with empty buckets on their poles, but as they passed the rack of personal belongings they deftly unhooked their bows and quivers. Pine Cone and Otter Woman were stirring the boiling sap, their faces clouded with steam, and the







other women did not notice the boys, who let the rush mat flap back across the door with a sigh of relief. But, bad medicine! Magpie was there!

"Aha!" she cried, eyeing the bows, "so you're going to play hookey, and the sap not half gathered, and all that, and all! You're running away, and after what your aunt told you! I am going to tell her, I am, and then you just see what will happen——"

"Oh, go on and tell!" called Bopo. "Go on and tattle! But you can't stop us!" and the two boys began to run. They could hear Magpie's shrill voice from the lodge—"and they are going hunting, and—" but with an extra spurt they were over the hill and out of sight and sound of camp.

"Ugh!" puffed Bopo, out of breath, "how these women bore me! They're good for nothing but talk! If a dog wagged his tail as much as Magpie wags her tongue, he'd come apart in an hour!" To which Olah agreed.

By this time they were well out of the maple thicket and trotting into thick fir timber.

"Wagh! Neechee, this is a wonderful day!" cried Olah, throwing back his shoulders and squinting through the drooping branches of a balsam fir. "And



they said, this morning, that this sun was only a pretense, that we should have a blizzard!"

"Another old woman's tale," said Bopo in disgust. "Always gloomy, always afraid! But let's forget the camp. Ho! there goes a Plume-Tail!" and he pointed to where, lippity-lippit, across the soft white, a small red body bounded toward a thick spruce. Both boys ran after him.

Bopo spotted him first, a mere wisp of tail-fluff against a dark limb. He aimed a blunt arrow but it missed, struck the tree trunk and bounded back into the snow. The squirrel ran out on the fuzzy balsam twigs to scold the two-legged animals below, and this left his white stomach exposed, a good mark. It being Olah's turn now, he pulled his bowstring to his chest and let fly. With a soft swish the arrow lifted into the darkness of the tree swiftly, and caught the squirrel fairly in the chest. He never knew what had hit him, and felt no pain. His spirit probably continued the chattering in the Happy Hunting Ground, but his red fluffy body came tumbling down to land with a soft thud between the two fallen arrows.

"Nezesheen, good!" cried Bopo. "You win! a very pretty shot."





*"Oh, go on and tell!" called Bopo.*

"Yes," agreed Olah, "it was my best blunt arrow, and didn't break the skin. I shall save and tan the fur, but his tail belongs to his spirit." So he drew a copper sheath knife, severed the bushy plume and hung it on a twig. "There! Now he can be happy in the spirit world," finished the hunter, drying his arrow and slipping the animal under his belt.

"Bopo," said Olah as he looked over the forest, "I think we had best separate. This swamp has high land on each side, which the squirrels keep to, and their tracks lead everywhere like weaving a basket. The sun will bring them out. I'll take this side and you take that, and see who'll shoot the most. We'll meet here when the sun goes down," he finished, wholly forgetting that this hunt was only to be a "little one."

"All right. Then we can go the two miles back to camp in a hurry," assented Bopo. "I'll bet my best arrow that I win!"

"You're on," laughed his friend, "my best arrow you don't," and away they went.

Olah ploughed through the snow, his moccasins leaving little ridges with each step. He saw a wind-fall where three large balsams had been uprooted in a storm, their trunks locking to form a tangle of thick green. Squirming into it, he waited a moment and, sure enough, there was a squirrel sunning himself on a bough. Spat! went his bowcord again, and he had doubled his kill.

On again into higher ground he missed two squirrels in succession, then he shot three. He wounded



a partridge and ran over logs and through deep snow for some time to get a finishing shot. More squirrels again until he had eight at his belt. Then suddenly his good hunting stopped. And though he walked and circled, and crossed rabbit runways and squirrel paths, no more game did he see. Another half hour passed, and no more luck. Finally he paused abruptly and looked at the heavens.

"It's funny, but I haven't seen the sun for some time," he thought. "That's why the Plume-Tails are not out any more. I hadn't noticed it, but the air is much colder, the sky has all gone grey. Perhaps I had best call it a day and go back to Bopo."

So, shouldering his partridge, he began to retrace his steps. As he neared the swamp, a huge shadowy thing fell softly out of a dead pine and drifted silently across his trail into the dense gloom of the forest.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Olah, stopping so short that the partridge jerked loose from his grip and dropped into the snow. "Bad medicine! The Drum-Eyed One, the Great Owl!" he breathed, as he picked up the partridge again and dusted the snow out of its feathers. "I wonder what is going to happen now?"

The sky grew suddenly darker and, as he hurried his steps to a trot, several white flakes drifted against the yellow buckskin of his sleeve.

"Snow!" he thought in consternation. "They were right, the old women at camp, after all!" and he hurried on, calling, "Yoo-hoo-oo, Bo-Po-o-o!" But, call as he might, there was only silence. He began to run, swiftly now and with no pauses, leaping

the underbrush and fallen logs like a frightened deer. Keeping his old trail in one corner of his eye, he watched the dark forest growing darker with the other. In and out like a shuttle he sped among the trunks. But just so surely as he was coming to the meeting place, just so surely were his tracks filling with large, feathery flakes. The air was freckled with white. He ran faster, and plunged recklessly into a tangle of brush. His strung bow caught on a branch and down he went in a smother, squirrels, arrows and the plump partridge.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed aloud. "I am as skittish as a girl! It serves me right. I must go slower!"

"I'll tell the woods you must," said a voice beside him, and there was Bopo, his eyes wide. "*You act scared!*"

"Well, you've been running yourself!" retorted Olah, glancing at the wide nostrils and heaving chest of the other. "Why did *you* run?"

"Wagh! Why? It looks like a blizzard to me," puffed Bopo. "The trail's filled up with snow. We can't see two yards ahead, and we'd never make the sugar camp in this! Besides—I saw a wolf!"

"A wolf?" exclaimed Olah, picking himself out of the tangle of branches still clinging to his legging fringe.

"A wolf and the tracks of five others," replied Bopo, furtively glancing into the shadows. "But that's not all—I'll tell you something else later."

"Wolves!" grunted Olah. "They're hungry this spring. My father once said he saw where they had

attacked a sleeping man—and Bopo! I saw the Drum-Eyed One, the Great Owl!" he whispered above the noise of the wind. "He soared right across my trail, almost touching! And *that's* bad medicine!"

The two boys crowded together in the snow and peered into the thick blanket of falling feathers. It was not a brilliant thought, this being shut off from camp in the forest, and night almost on them. At last Olah cleared his throat.

"Well, we must make the best of it like true men," he said with a firmness he did not feel. "We're in for a night of it, and we need shelter and a fire. There's a balsam back there in the hollow where I shot a squirrel. The windfall would be a good break from the wind, and there are plenty of dead branches for the fire. Have you your rubbing sticks?"

"Always carry them in my quiver," said Bopo. "Let's run for it."

Out of the wind in the thick tangle, Bopo produced his fire-drill, and with a pinch of cedar tinder from his pouch, soon had a blaze. They built a pyramid with sticks, and in no time a lively fire was crackling merrily.

"Great stuff, Neechee!" grinned Olah, beginning





to skin one of the squirrels and feeling more cheerful. "A little food and we shall feel better. I feel much better already."

"But I don't feel so well, myself," said Bopo, pulling feathers and skin from the grouse and gazing moodily into the fire. "Perhaps we were too hasty, this morning, when we went out against Aunt Otter Woman's warning. You know, she has quite a lot of sense for a woman. She foretold that flood on the Great River, you know, and warned our fathers not to go. If she hadn't been taking care of both of us babies at the time, we should have drowned with our families. And it was only last week that she had a dream, you remember, and saw a blizzard, and then burned grass, and then she saw the Thunderbird!"

"Yes, I know," assented Olah, looking over his shoulder from time to time into the darkness. "She said that he held black clouds in his wings, and his claws—it was his claws that she was frightened about, Neechee! She said they were dripping blood. But then the dog howled, and she woke up, and couldn't figure it out at all."

"Well, I saw something besides the wolves' tracks back there in the snow," said Bopo. "I saw a large track, just one, like a big bird, and there was blood where the claws were! But it wasn't an eagle! Do you suppose, Olah, that the Thunderbird has something to do with this storm?"

"Oh, no!" said Olah quickly, "he sends only the rain. And this is a blizzard!" But his words seemed rather hollow, even to himself.

For a moment they both listened. The forest creaked and groaned all around them. Fitful gusts shook their puny shelter as though some demon sought entrance. And suddenly, above the moan of the balsams, a long-drawn note rose somewhere out of the blackness, fell, and died away in the wind. Olah shivered, and Bopo gasped, "A wolf!"





## CHAPTER TWO

Again it sounded, now more distinctly.

"Ow-Ow-Ow-Owoo-oo-oo-agh! Owoo-oo——"

The two boys sat huddled together as though made of one block of ice. For the wail they had just heard was not the wail of a wolf, nor of any animal! It was something far more hideous. It rose and eddied through the bleak forest like the ghost of something long dead. Then silence. But now the sighing of fir branches was the gasping of demons, ghastly formless demons clinging to the upper darkness and whispering over their prey. And the fire, which had crackled so merrily a few short moments ago, was now a gruesome spirit gnawing bones.

"What—what is it?" gasped Bopo, the short hairs of his neck prickling with icy fear.

"It is black magic," hissed Olah. "It is the bad medicine brought by the Drum-Eyed One!"

"Or maybe it is the Thunderbird, himself," moaned Bopo, "coming to punish us for our rashness!"



A third time the cry was repeated, and this brought an answering howl, dismal and dismaying, from another direction. Soon the call came from still another quarter. The storm was filled with a bedlam of shrieks and ghoulish screams, which seemed to swirl with the snow and sweep over the drifts with the wind. Then, as suddenly as a thong is cut with a knife, they ceased altogether. And except for a few flakes still spinning in the empty air, the storm had gone, the wind chasing off through the forest like a monster running away.

"By the Chipmunk who is my totem, the weather is clearing!" whispered Bopo. "I wonder if those things have gone?"

"I'll sing to Mong, my Loon Father," whispered Olah, taking a stick in his trembling hand and beating a soft rhythm against his moccasin sole. "But even he may be angry. We should not have gone against Aunt Otter Woman! I am afraid. But I'll sing my song." And he began a chant of four notes.

"Oh Loon Father, send away the wind!

Chase him into the forest, and bend the trees  
like brooms,

Bend the tall trees like brooms and brush away  
the clouds,

Brush away the Cloud-Witches and show the  
Moon!"

And before long, the darkness faded and a cold glow crept into the forest; the snow was greenish-white with moonlight filtered between black slits of tree shadow.

"Ah!" exclaimed Olah, catching his breath, "Mong heard my prayer! Perhaps he is not angry. Perhaps the Thunderbird is not angry—"

"Not so fast," hissed Bopo, "or give your totem another song quickly, because if you see what I do, we'll need many prayers! There! Look there!" and he pointed to a dark object, squatting on the snow in the full glare of the moon.

The boys gasped in terror, for it was a Something not of this earth. Squat, without form, it moved slowly toward them, sweeping over the drifts without sound. As it neared their shelter, the trembling lads saw with horror that it had a head, a horrible head with empty sockets for eyes, and a lean jaw which slowly opened and shut with a flabby click.

This was too much. Olah got behind the fire,



and Bopo reached for his bow, but it was with lagging hands. They moved as in a nightmare. Their minds were stunned, their muscles refused to work. Like helpless birds charmed by snakes, so were they charmed. The empty eye sockets held them powerless. And as they watched in horror the approach of this thing of Death, four long clawlike hands reached into their shelter from behind, and before they could resist settled in a chill grip about their throats.

Bopo felt that he was dying, if not already dead. He went over into the snow without a cry. Olah was powerless, but something made him reach out a hand above and behind him. It came in contact with a leg. Before he was dashed into the snow, he saw distinctly a buckskin legging with porcupine quill-work in triangular designs, and his brief glimpse galvanized him into action.

"Men! Bopo, Men!" he cried, "Only men!" and an answering cry told him that Bopo had found out, too. They were, after all, human beings, and not shadows of the grave with whom they had to deal. So they fought with the fury of two young cubs, tooth and nail, and Bopo had the satisfaction of feeling his teeth sink deep into flesh.

It was soon over. The two boys lay bound on the packed snow of their shelter, and three men in gruesome paint sat ringed about. Even as they collected their thoughts, a fourth strode into the circle of light. From his shoulders flapped a loose moosehide, and on his head hung the mask with the



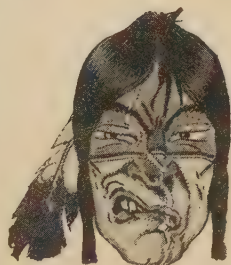
empty eyesockets and the floppy jaws that had terrified the boys a few moments before. They all looked at the boys in merriment, and laughed. All but one, a tall, sour-looking man with a deep scar across his entire face. He was nursing a bitten arm and his scowl was terrible to see. He bent and kicked Bopo in the ribs, robbing him of breath and leaving him squirming in pain.

"You snake!" squealed Olah, in good Chippewa, trying to get at the man with his feet, hands, anything. But a kick sent him, too, sprawling. However, by this time, a large man with a kindly face began remonstrating with the cruel one. It was a language the boys had never heard, but they gathered, by the tones, that the scar-nosed one was being lectured.

"That's right, give it to him!" bellowed Olah. "Kicking a couple of fellows when they're down! Just let me up and give me a tomahawk, and I'll show him how to fight, the big moose!"

All of this, of course, got them nowhere, but the big man with the kindly face smiled at Olah's spirit, though he could not understand the Chippewa words. The scar-nosed one only scowled the harder, and his right lip drew back as a wolf snarls, showing the greenish teeth beneath. Olah shuddered and winced from his harsh bindings.

"Of all bad medicine, Neechee, of all the worst luck!" he said

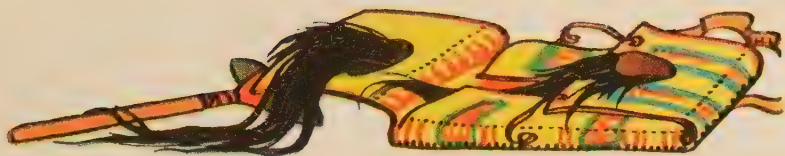


between his clenched jaws. "Captured by Bwanoz with a child's trick, and only two miles from the sugar camp! We certainly deserve whatever we're going to get," and he lay back in the snow.

"Yes, and that will not be a lump of maple sugar, either, judging from the fellow who just kicked us. Oh, *why* did we have the heads of fishes and not wisdom enough to heed the old women? If I ever get home again—" but this was too much. The sugar camp was only two miles away, but their home, by the Great Water Kitchi-Gami seemed as far away now as the moon. The two boys were silent, stabbed by fears and self-accusations. They lay still while one of the Sioux stirred up the fire.

And so they were taken captive, and the lot of the captive was theirs. The women at the sugar camp could never find them now, for their trail had been blotted out by the blizzard. With the morning they were whisked away, each made to walk ahead of a man, wrists bound with rawhide that bit into the flesh. And, though they were allowed the freedom of their hands at night around the fire, their ankles were bound to the belts of men nearby.

As far as the boys could learn they had been taken by a small scouting party out to get news of the main Chippewa settlements on the shore of the Great Water Kitchi-Gami, dangerous ground for any Sioux. The scar-nosed one had taken two scalps, for these Bopo had seen in his open parfleche, one evening. However, there was little likelihood of



their having come from the sugar camp, for the scalps were weeks old, shriveled and smoked. It had turned out just as their Aunt Otter Woman had told them, time and again. The Sioux, every spring, crossed their eastern boundaries and ventured into Chippewa woodlands where they made sugar. Afterwards, they would trek back across their own woods to the great plains, hundreds of miles away. This scouting party had evidently come from just such a sugar camp, and now the boys would go back to it with them. Then what? Would they be taken along with the tents and the belongings to the place of no trees? Or would their bones be left for the coyote and the crow to show what happens when Sioux takes Chippewa?

Week after week went by. Warm winds replaced the cool ones and finally came the south wind, which sucked away the snow. The sun whittled it off the slopes in masses. Travel became easier and feet did not slip in the trail. Lake after lake, stream after stream they passed, hurrying so fast that the minds of the boys were but blurs of tree trunks passing on each side.

"Getting towards Bwanoz territory," said Olah, one evening, mending his moccasin with moosehide tossed them by the man with the kind face. "Lucky



that the old man gave us this stuff, I should have been barefoot in another hour."

"And I, too," replied Bopo, ruefully eyeing his own wornout gear. "But I am harder now than when we started out. Then I was tender as a rabbit, but now I am hard as copper! I could walk all day, sleep all night walking, and still turn corners. I could sleep on ice and be warm, but I haven't grown used to being so hungry. I hope they shoot a deer soon. This brittle buffalo meat is as tough as my leggings. If we are to die, I want to die with a full stomach!"

The next day, Bopo's wish was gratified, though unintentionally. One man shot a deer that ran ahead of them in the trail. They had a feast after that and the boys were allowed to help themselves. Bopo stuffed, but afterwards felt as an animal fattened for the slaughter. However, the men were better natured. They even sang on the trail, so the boys knew they had no fear now of being followed. And in another day they came to a thinning in the woods along a wide river, when on the other side they saw a line of Sioux teepees, their poles pricking the blue sky like porcupine quills. Here was the sugar camp, a temporary settlement which would soon pack up and move westward to the permanent earth lodges of the Sioux.



The party was ferried across the river in three canoes, and such a welcome as the men received! There was a hubbub of women in brilliant buckskin garments, and a screeching of small children, and a barking of dogs. Everything was whooping that could whoop, and every foot that could make dust made it, until the air was thick with flying feathers and the whirlwind of welcome. In the midst of this the boys were led to a solitary teepee standing apart from the others. The scar-faced one shoved them inside, still wrist-bound, and closed the flap.

"Well, this is the end of our journey for the present," said Olah.

"Yes," agreed Bopo, gloomily, "but if I read the signs rightly, this is not the end of our troubles. This teepee must belong to our friend of the evil face. When he went out, he took a scalp pole that he found in the back. He seems to know where things are."

"This is a snug wigwam," said Olah, walking about and studying the details.

"Do you remember the picture my father left on my cradle?" said Bopo. "Aunt Otter Woman has it yet. Rows of these tents, all made of buffalo hide and stitched with sinew. He drew them all correctly, for he had made war on the Sioux many times."

"Yes," continued his friend, "and my father made some similar on a birch basket. But the best was a design showing the Bwanoz breaking camp, loading the rolled hides on the poles and tying them over dogs' backs. Aunt Otter Woman said that they

can break camp completely in a few minutes. They are clever at dodging an enemy on the plains, but are no good when it comes to the woods."

"See, here!" exclaimed Bopo, pointing with a foot to a length of soft doeskin hanging around the willow couch. "This is the owner's life record. He is a man of honors, but not a chief. He has killed many in battle. And, yes, it is our friend of the demon face. See, here is a man's head with a red line across the front! That's the scar! And the rattlesnake is his totem. You might know that he'd associate with serpents!"

"He has killed many people, but here is an especially good writing. See that headgear of moosehide? That's a Chippewa! He was scalped, and then a woman was killed—but there isn't any scalp shown. Then there's a baby. No scalp there, either, but a cradle with a long line to a teepee. I can't make that out."

"At any rate," said Bopo gloomily, growing tired of watching the painted lines, "he is a Chippewa killer. And if I guess correctly, he'd like to kill us, too. But perhaps we can use our wits—"

Olah's attention was riveted to a bulge at the lining bottom which appeared to move. All of a sudden the covering lifted and there was a young girl of about their own age on her hands and knees, her red-bound braids trailing. She was breathing quickly, and as she crawled inside her hands went to her mouth as a sign of silence. For a full minute she listened. The boys were too surprised to say anything.





*All of a sudden the covering lifted and there was a young girl.*

"My name is Wawena, and I have come to help you," she whispered in good Chippewa. It was the first time for weeks that the boys had heard their own language and it made them happy.

"This is a sugar camp," she went on hurriedly, listening every few words, "and tomorrow we move on to the great towns on the plains. You will either be taken as captives with us, and be adopted into the tribe later, or you will be killed tonight. Red Wolf, the Indian who captured you, is pleading now in the council for your adoption."

"Good!" said Olah, under his breath. "I knew he was kind! He—"

"But Scar-Face," went on the girl interrupting, "is for burning you both at the stake! He is mad with blood. He is the man with the cut nose. He is my foster-father—"

"Your foster-father?" cried Bopo in surprise. "*That* demon in human skin? Why, he ought to be tied on an ants' nest with a fire on his back, and—" but she quieted him with a wave of her hand.

"I have only a few moments before I can get away again without being seen. I am a Chippewa. I wish to get away from my cruel father, who has done nothing but make my life miserable ever since I can remember. I know the country for two days' travel to the east, and if possible I will have a canoe with provisions ready tonight at the river bank, just at dusk. If I find that we can escape without being seen, I will come again. If everything proves hopeless, I shall hang a red deerskin up at the right of

this teepee. That will mean that I have failed in everything, and that Scar-Face has succeeded in his plot. And Scar-Face has much to say in the council." Here she paused, listening.

"I must go! I hear someone!" and she had slipped under the tent edge and disappeared.

"The Great Spirit is indeed good to us, Neechee!" ejaculated Bopo. "He has sent this girl to us! I never thought that we'd be hopeless like this and waiting for a girl's help! But we need help, for that man Scar-Face would carve us up like so much venison if he were given half a chance!"

At that moment the flap opened, and there stood a sour-faced fellow with three fingers on one hand and a leering squint to his eyes. He stood looking in on the two boys as though they were animals fattening for food, and when he went away again there was a cruel smile flickering about his mouth. He dropped the flap.

"Ugh!" grunted Bopo. "Very bad medicine!" and Olah whispered, "Yes, he's no friend of ours, whoever he is!"

Suddenly they heard feet approaching rapidly, and in a moment Scar-Face himself had ripped back the teepee flap and stepped inside. As he stood there, a look of sullen rage overspread his features. His hands trembled with violence surging within, and he reached for Olah. That young man stepped back swiftly. It did not help his pounding heart to look past Scar-Face and see the man with the squint eyes.





Yet when affairs appeared to be at the crisis, when the boys felt that these men had come to carry them to the stake itself, Red Wolf came on the scene. There were a few quick words. Scar-Face wheeled and poured out a torrent of hate-barbed gutterals, and Squint-Eye added a scorching tongue. Then the flap fell down behind them, shutting the men from view, but by the noise the boys guessed that their fate still hung in the balance.

The argument was hotly contested. More voices were added, and feet came running. Many tongues were talking at once, but suddenly a voice of authority gave a command, and the hubbub drew away again until only a dull murmur was left.

"They are going back to the council to fight it out again," whispered Olah. "But, Bopo! Whatever happens, we will not be butchered without resistance! I have loosened my thongs, and if you could back up to me, and wriggle them a little—"

It took some time, but at last Olah was free. He quickly unbound his friend. Then he ran to the teepee flap, lifting it enough to peer out. He looked to the right, as the girl had told him.

"What do you see?" hissed Bopo in his ear. When Olah did not answer he crept up to the flap and added his eye to the slit. Then his heart turned to stone within him, for, from a thorn bush at the edge of the clearing was a large square of red deerskin!





### CHAPTER THREE

That piece of red deerskin hanging in the bushes meant only one thing. The council had voted for the immediate destruction of the two boys. The girl, Wawena, had failed in everything. It was but a matter of minutes, perhaps, before they would be led to the post, bound back to back, and left to the red tongues of flame reaching out from the fag-gots to sear their quivering flesh! The sun was down; it was dusk in the village. One moment more might be too late!

Both boys threw themselves flat on their stomachs and peered under the bottom of the teepee. There were guards in front preventing any escape in that direction. There were, of course, others in the rear—but they would see. So, cautiously peering beneath the rear wall, the boys came face to face with—Wawena.

She had waited long to get to them. The sentry placed to watch the teepee at the back had gone for a chat with someone behind the next lodge, and she had found her chance.



"Everyone is at the council!" she cried in a whisper. "Here, let me cut your bonds. What, you are free? There is no better time to escape than now! I tried to get provisions to the canoe without being seen, but once the dogs got what I had placed, and another time there were too many children playing nearby for safety. So there are no provisions. Run to the river—take your pick of the three canoes there—"

"But I don't understand!" said Olah. "You hung out the signal on the bush, the red buckskin! We thought they had decided death—"

"No, not yet! They are still debating! And I didn't hang that skin up. Old Buffalo Woman was dyeing leather for a dancing costume, and hung that up to dry. I couldn't take it down without her seeing me. But we must not talk any more. The sentry may be back at any moment! You have a clear path now! Go!"

The two lads ducked out under the buffalo hide, and crouched ready to run, but Olah glanced back. There sat Wawena as they had last seen her, slumped against the teepee like a sack. Olah slipped back to her and hissed in her ear.

"Quick! What are you sitting here for?" he gasped. "Hurry!"

"No," she returned, "you'll need all your wits to beat them, and you can't afford to be hindered by a girl! I will stay here!"

"No!" said Olah, roughly seizing her arm. "If you won't go with us, we will remain. That is final!"

Wawena saw that he meant it. A look of intense joy came over her sad little face.

"All right," she said, stiffening her neck as one does before diving into icy water, "I'm with you! Now run!"

At that moment a sudden flare of light shot from near the council lodge. The flap had been thrown open, and the glow from within was reflected from the green brush outside. There were voices, and the sound of thudding feet. The council had ended!

But, whatever the verdict, the boys did not wait. Three forms crept out from behind the teepee and shot toward the river bank. The boys had started slowly to keep pace with the girl, but they soon found out that this was not needed. She was as swift as a rabbit, and outdistanced them both by two lengths. Over the bank! A long slide down the clay side of it! And there, on the gravelled shingle were the three canoes, bottom up.

Bopo picked the smallest and lightest hastily. With Wawena's help he turned the craft over and launched it, while Olah was smashing the other canoe bottoms with a large rock. Crash! Creak! went the ripping birch bark and splintering wood shells of the fragile canoes. A few well-aimed blows and they were out of commission. No man could chase them on the water now. But on land—that was a different thing.

Two dogs, running along the river, saw them and began to bark. The curs yelped and howled. Wawena tried to quiet them, but through some



sixth sense they knew that something was amiss in their village. And, in answer to their yowlings, came a long wavering whoop from above. Someone had discovered the escape!

Olah gave a hard kick to the shore as he leapt swiftly into the stern, and the agile boat shot outward like a startled duck from cover.

"The paddle, quickly," he hissed. He heard Bopo rummaging in the bow, and then a silence.

"Didn't you find a paddle under those canoes?" Bopo hissed back. "There's none here!"

"Oh," cried Wawena under her breath, "I might have known. They always take the paddles up to the teepees after dark!" and a silence, a dread silence, fell on all three.

Meanwhile the canoe was being taken by the current, and hurried along parallel to the shore but not far out. Back at the landing a tall form rushed to the bank edge, stood silhouetted a moment against the sky, then dropped to the beach below. A howl came, then shouts, and cries. They had found the demolished canoes, had discovered one was missing. Wawena listened.

"I hear Scar-Face," she whispered. "That voice



above all the rest. He says that the canoe is drifting downstream, and for them all to get their bows and shoot from the bank! But I also hear Red Wolf, and he is ordering them not to shoot! But I know Scar-Face! He will kill us all! He will go to the buffalo ford! Oh, we *must* have a paddle!" and she shivered in the bottom of the canoe with excitement and fear.

"I have it!" she cried at last. "Not a paddle, but some good substitutes. On the other side, if we can reach it, is a shallow pit where the women have been digging clay for cooking pots. Their shovels are made of buffalo shoulder blades lashed to short poles, and they usually leave them in a cache at the side of the pit. If we can reach it in time, they will make good paddles!"

Olah and Bopo were not Chippewa lads for nothing. The canoe is the burdenbearer of the woodland Indian. It is his horse, and his plaything. And many a race had these boys run against each other on their home lakes, with paddles left behind. So now they knelt on the bottom and, with hands slashing backward like the feet of a duck, little by little they edged the canoe in toward the other side. It took Wawena little time to locate the pit in the darkness, and in a minute or two she appeared on the shore with four clumsy shovels in her arms.



"Nezesheen!" cried Olah. "Good work! You are a true Chippewa, because you think fast and not like the slow Bwanoz!" So saying he took the largest for the stern, balancing it in his hand. Bopo selected another, shorter in the handle, while with a smaller one Wawena crouched in the center and amidships.

"Now let them come," cried Olah, his head high, and feeling every inch a warrior. "Now let them try to get us! They are turtles, running on the land, but we are swift trout in the water. We shall soon outdistance them!"

"Don't speak of that too soon," broke in Wawena between short strokes on the side, "because the river narrows down about a mile away, where the buffalo cross. There is a short-cut to this place from camp, and I know Scar-Face! Our danger has just begun. He will be waiting there for us with arrows!"

Nobody spoke after this for some time. The camp with its fires was far behind, but the situation was growing more desperate every moment. At last Bopo broke the silence. "I have an idea," he said. "Olah, steer us to the shore."

Meanwhile two men, swift of foot, had left the Sioux camp at one edge and run out on the plain. They ran steadily, their bows held in the left hand, their quivers clamped beneath their arms to keep the arrows from rattling. They ran to the place where the river narrowed. There was no doubt about it, these men were angry and ready to kill!

To the buffalo ford they came. The water here was very swift, though there were no rocks. At



*The two men knelt and drew their bows.*



this point the river was a stone's-throw wide, its banks rose steeply on each side, shelving off at the base into a smooth place where the buffalo trail crossed. To the top of the bank the two men crawled and lay flat. And one of them was a man with a scar on his face and the other a man with squint eyes.

They had made good time. Their bows were strung, and a line of arrows lay ready to hand at their sides. Each had fully recovered his breath. Like wolves waiting for the young of the deer, they were motionless.

Down came the canoe steadily. Three forms crouched low inside.

"O-ho," laughed Scar-Face wickedly, "They think to outwit us by crouching in the bottom! But, dogs of the Chippewa, puppies of dogs! Their night has come!"

"Yes," hissed Squint-Eye, "we will shoot them down like the muskrats they are!"

"I kept that girl against my wish," continued Scar-Face grinding his teeth, "thinking I could make a Sioux out of her. But it's bred in the bone! Once a Chippewa, always a Chippewa! Now this is the end. I will kill her, and hang her scalp on my pole with her father's. Then I shall have only her mother to hunt down and my teepee painting will be complete. So, you take the stern boy, and leave me the middle. That's sure to be the girl. Then we can both finish off the other one."

By now the canoe was directly beneath the bank. The two men knelt and drew their bows.

"Ready?" whispered Squint-Eye, and the other responded, "Ready, shoot!"

Two arrows left two strings and hurtled into the murky darkness below. Above the swish of running water came one sharp cry, then another, long and quivering. Two more arrows dropped downward into the now swiftly moving canoe, and another short cry floated back. The shafts, all of them, had told. The two men looked at each other and smiled.

Squint-Eye chuckled. "Three scalps between us."

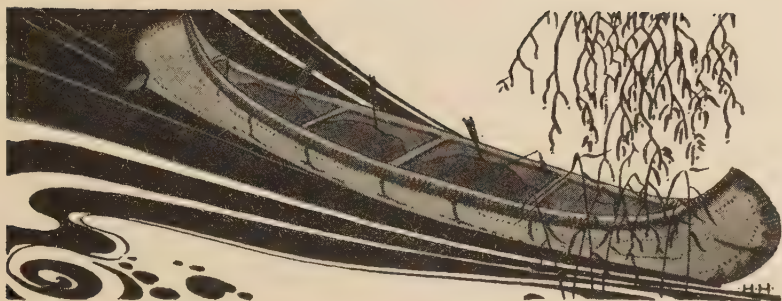
They watched the canoe. It had shot the swift water, and now would drift in toward their shore. But there was something wrong with the current.

"That puzzles me," said Scar-Face. "It drifted wrongly, and now we'll have to swim for it." So, rolling their bows in their leggings, they waded into the stream. It was not difficult to swim the shallows that the buffalo had chosen for their fording place. The canoe would surely drift and lodge in the brush on the other bank.

They touched bottom on the other side, scrambled ashore and began their hunt. In every nook and cove they hunted, but no canoe did they find.

"We'll find it in the morning," they said to each other. "It can't be far from here." And they curled up and went to sleep on the bank.

And meanwhile, far below them on the river, three young Chippewas in a birch canoe paddled for their lives.



## CHAPTER FOUR

The canoe had swerved up to the shore and two forms glided out of the willows by the bank, crept down the slope to meet it. As it swung its white body nearer in the dark, a small black object could be distinguished bobbing slowly along at the stern. This detached itself from the canoe and rose up out of the water. One of the dusky forms spoke.

"Good, Neechee!" it said in a low voice. "Are you hurt?"

"Not a bit," replied the black object, rising dripping from the river. "They were fooled completely! It's a good thing they were good shots, for the canoe isn't damaged a bit. I shrieked myself hoarse when we were supposed to be hit, so they think they got us all right. I tried my best to scream like a girl, but the water got into my mouth and I gurgled the best part of it."

"But they will soon be coming across for our scalps and we had best get out of here. So let's take the corpses out of the terrible death boat!" and Bopo laughed gleefully.



Three neat piles of driftwood, each covered with grass and evergreen boughs were quickly unloaded. From the bank, back there at the ford, they had looked exactly like three small bodies crouched close to the bottom of the craft.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Olah. "Here's my death wound," and he pulled up a length of pine with an arrow imbedded solidly in its middle. "Right in the throat!"

"And mine," exclaimed Wawena. "Whoever shot that knew me and aimed for me particularly. Right through the middle of the back! I couldn't have made a sound with a wound like that!" And, shuddering a little, she held up a short log with a long arrow attached. The flint had passed out of sight into the wood. At the feather end a white tuft of down showed in the night.

"Ah!" she gasped. "Now I am sure! I haven't lived with Scar-Face's arrows all my life without knowing one when I see it! He shot at me, intentionally! And now I am certain that he shot my father. I am a Chippewa! That is the meaning of the red painting on the teepee lining which I have hated ever since I can remember!"

"Then you are the baby painted there," cried Olah, "and the cradle with the line to the teepee means that you were taken into Scar-Face's lodge! But as I remembered it, the woman in the picture escaped, too."

"At least, he never painted the scalp," said Wawena, "although I remember his saying to me

during the bleak winter evenings when he had beaten me for something I couldn't help, 'someday I will finish the picture, and perhaps you shall help me!' Yes, now I know what he meant! Who knows, perhaps my mother may be still alive—"

"But if you were so very young when you were taken, how do you happen to know so much Chippewa, and so much concerning the tribe?" inquired Olah.

"That is a long story. But the short part of it is that the Sioux took a Chippewa woman when I was about five years old. She cared for me, and became my fast friend. She taught me her language and woodcraft, for she guessed that I was a Chippewa, and instilled in me the desire to escape some day. When Scar-Face found that I could speak another language he became suspicious, and from that day Morning Star withered away and finally died. I think Scar-Face poisoned her. He hated her very much, though the other people liked her." Wawena was silent.

"Well," said Bopo gloomily, "he is a very bad man. He has the spirit of a snake devil. Someday the Thunderbird will punish him. But somehow I got more than either of you. See here!" and he held up one splintered arrow and another, still clinging to bits of wood.

"Scar-Face and Squint-Eye," said Wawena posi-



tively. "Their shafts look alike, and are shot in the same manner. Two men who make even their own people ashamed of them at times."

Olah looked long across the river. "We had best be going," he said shortly. "They will swim, and they may swim faster than we think."

At this all climbed into the canoe again and swung into the channel.

"Bopo, tell us what happened when you left us with the wood-piles in your craft," said Wawena.

"Well, I started wading," said Bopo from the bow, "then the current took me into deep water, so all I did was hang on and kick now and then to steer. I looked up from the stern once when the river grew swifter, and saw two men against the sky. I had hold of the gunwale, and thought they might see either me or my hand, but I guess they didn't take any notice of me when they made out the three bundles inside. I heard the "chuck" as the arrows struck, and knew when to yell. I was afraid that one or two might miss and go through the canoe, and then I might have been hit, but I kept singing to my totem all the time in my mind, and he gave me good medicine all the way. And then it was over, and here we are," he finished simply. "But tell me how you two came out?"

"We had no trouble," replied Olah. "Wawena knows the country, and we merely circled the high bank at the narrows, and then waited for you. Nee-chee! You have done a very brave thing, tonight," he ended.

Wawena paused in her paddling. "And I owe my life to you, Bopo," she said. "I will remember it."

"Oh, it was nothing," exclaimed Bopo, becoming embarrassed. "Nothing at all! The Bwanos are a stupid lot, and any small trick will fool them," he continued, and began paddling with renewed vigor.

Several strokes further on a new danger threatened. Olah gave a sudden grunt, and the canoe wobbled.

"Paddle's out of commission!" he reported. "These aren't all they should be, though they've done us the best of service under the circumstances. But the rawhide that binds the shoulder-blade to the wood has stretched away with the wet, and the bone has sunk. Give me the extra paddle."

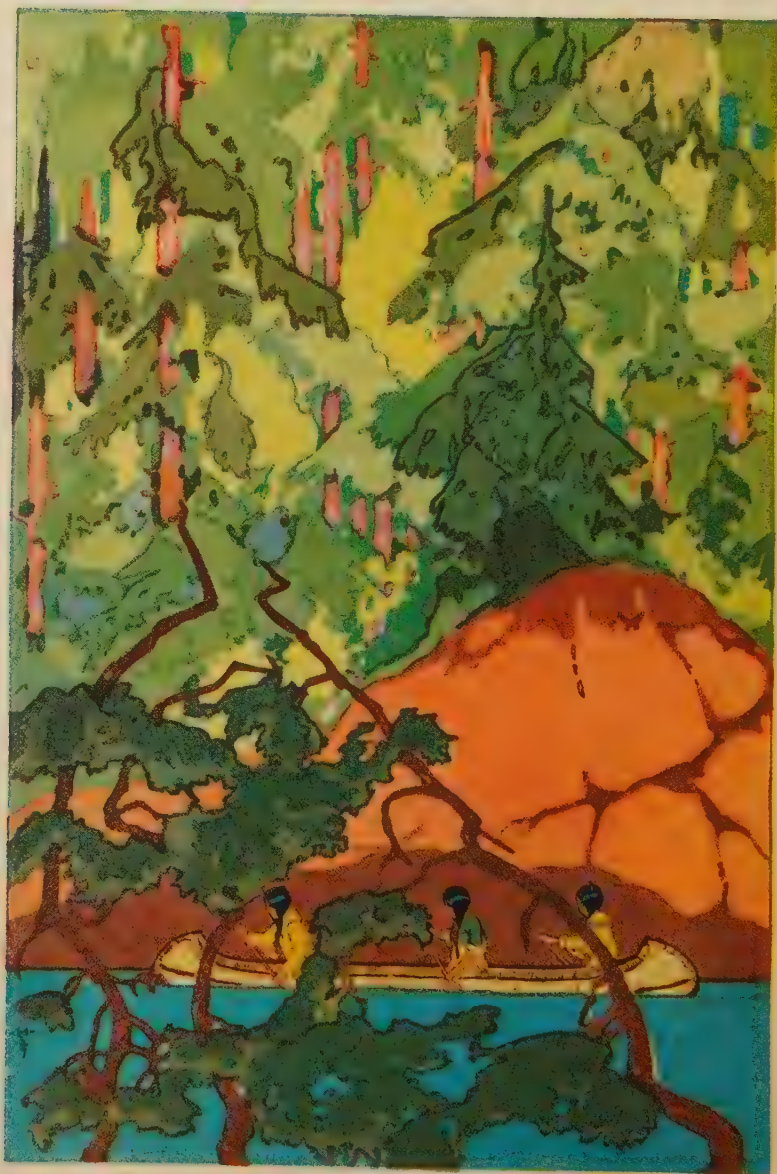
"That means we'll have to stop somewhere until morning, when we can make paddles," said Bopo thoughtfully.

"Not yet," spoke up the girl. "You just edge up to the bank for a few minutes and I'll show you." So saying, she reached for some long willow shoots fringing the thicket, and peeled them with her teeth. Removing the sodden rawhide lashings, she rolled them into neat bundles for future use, and replaced them with newly-peeled withes, binding them tightly and securely. When she had finished, their supply of paddles was better than before.

"Nezesheen! Good!" exclaimed Bopo and Olah in admiration.

"Now where do we go next?" continued Bopo. "We must strike for the Great Water, and that lies





*Wawena paddled with them.*

east. By the stars, this river flows west and south."

"Leave that to me," replied Wawena. "We are out of immediate danger, for Scar-Face and his evil companion will be thrown off the scent by morning. They have no more canoes. Now, farther down, this river takes in one flowing from the north and east. Without landing we can go through a lagoon to another river. The sugar camp moves tomorrow for the big villages to the west, and they will not remain to look us up, since there are about thirty different waterways which they'd have to search. It would take them a month to find us after we reach the lagoon. But that takes steady paddling for the remainder of the night, and all tomorrow. The next day ought to see us in a lake surrounded by high rocks on three sides and a shoreline so cut up as to be a good hiding place for camp. But it will mean hard work for all of us. I have some dried pemmican in my belt pouch for one day's rations, so if you think you can do it, and are not too tired—"

"Tired?" said Bopo and Olah together. "After what we have been through these last weeks we are hard as granite. Nothing can tire us!"

And it was almost true. These youngsters, tough as rawhide from a life in the open, were doubly toughened by their trials of the trip to the Sioux camp. They thought nothing of a two-night and one-day paddle up the rivers of the woods. So they bent to their task with determination. And Wawena, girl of the wilderness that she was, brought up from infancy to sleepless journeys, paddled with them.

Through that night and into the morning they worked. All day long their arms swung in rhythm. A little pemmican, a little dried buffalo meat washed down with cold water was all they had for food.

And then came the second night. The boys, though wiry, by this time were beginning to show their fatigue. The journey had been a strenuous one, even for men. Their arms ached at the shoulders, their hands were stiff and sore, but they gritted their teeth and kept on. The lagoon was past and a small river opened before them, its rapid current seeming to thwart their every effort. But on they swung with the endless beat, Wawena keeping with them, turn for turn and stroke for stroke. Olah began to think she would never tire. He began to think his arms would drop off, that the river would never end, that morning was lost forever. But at last the sun peeped a pale eye above the woods, and there, ahead, hemmed in by rock and forest, was the lake! At last they were safe!



In a half hour they had made camp on a rock shelf that jutted into a small bay, and here they pulled out the canoe. Turning it over, the three of them sprawled out full length in the sun like lizards, and soon were sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

The boys might have slept on indefinitely, had they not been awakened by a voice. Bopo, whose dreams had been fitful, rolled over and over, and Olah plunged sidewise to his feet. Bwanoz! they both thought, their brains reeling. But, as Olah reached for a stone, he heard a rippling laugh nearby, and then a girl's voice.

"Olah! Bopo! Come quickly and help me!"

Both boys leaped to their senses and ran around the projecting cliff. There was Wawena struggling with a pole at the edge of the rock shelf. Here the water was very deep. When the boys arrived they saw that a large, beautiful trout wriggled at the end of the pole. Wawena could not land him for fear of his struggling loose. He was soon flipped to the rock, and clubbed.

"Good medicine!" exclaimed both boys in admiration once more. "How did you do it?"

"Simple enough," said Wawena. "I woke up sooner than you did, and after a little scouting for food, saw these beauties. See?" and she pointed to where, below, the water was alive with trout.

"Then with my legging fringe I rigged up this spear. The rest was easy, and if you are careful, we can get plenty of them. What we can't eat now



I can smoke over a willow fire, and we shall begin storing up food for the big journey."

Practising with the clumsy spear, the boys succeeded in landing a dozen fish before the trout veered away permanently from the rock ledge. Then fire materials were found.

By breaking and grinding on a stone they shaped a six-sided drill, pointed at each end, and made a fire board, both of cedar. Now a notch was cut in and the drill was placed with one point at the notch's end. With a bent stick as a bow, rawhide string was attached to each end, and the slack in the middle wound once around the drill as it stood upright. The top of the drill fitted into a hollow in a stone



held in the hand. And now, with everything ready and the fireboard beneath held solid, Olah sawed back and forth with the bow, the cord spinning the drill. The friction of the drill point on the fire board produced heat, and, as it spun, it ground out a fine brown powder which turned black, smoked in thin spirals and filled up the notch. At last the drill was taken away, and the smoking powder was fanned into a red eye of coal, and with a pinch of shredded cedar bark and more blowing, there burst forth a yellow flame. They had fire!

And soon the smell of fresh trout crisping on red coals made the world seem all right again! Once more Bopo had plenty of food!





## CHAPTER FIVE

"What an ideal place for outfitting," said Bopo after a hearty meal of trout. "Here we are, safe for the present at least, and Wawena knows the trails back to the Divide. But we need new paddles, for these old ones, even with Wawena's good work on them, are almost past fixing."

"And we need to kill a deer, for without jerked meat, we can't go far," continued Wawena.

"Well," spoke up Olah, "that means that we must make bows and arrows. Over on this side of the lake is cedar timber in a swampy strip, and I am certain we can get a fallen tree, well seasoned, to produce good bow wood. Let's separate and see what we can find."

So the three set out, each on a different mission. The fire died down to a smouldering bed of charred wood, but before it had died completely, back came Bopo dragging a length of dead spruce log, which he dumped down on the rock ledge. After looking for some time among water-worn boulders and heaps of frost-split rocks, he returned with several stones

roughly wedge-shaped. These he hammered into one end of the log in a row, using a heavy club as a mallet, and by deft manipulation of his rough tools finally succeeded in splitting out a flat slab from the straight-grained billet. Another and another he worked away until he had three boards an inch or two thick, and about as long as his own height. As he hunted for more rocks, Olah came puffing up with a bundle of cedar staves in his arms.

"Ha! Neechee, paddle timber, I see!" he exclaimed, eyeing the boards appreciatively, for he had split many a paddle board himself. "It won't take us long to hack out and finish three of those. While scouting around, I found just what we need for bows. There was a dead cedar down the bay, well seasoned; where it had fallen across a log, it had splintered into long staves, just right for bow making. It was easy to chop them out with a few jagged rocks. And now here comes Wawena with something else."

"Good medicine!" exclaimed the girl breathlessly, racing down the bluff from above. "I found some flint for knives and arrow heads. And I set some cedar-bast snares in a swamp full of rabbit runways, so we shall have something to bind the heads with by tomorrow morning. And I found some straight willow shoots for arrow shafts, and a grouse killed by a weasel, so we have feathers for the shafts, and good birch bark for carrying baskets, and—"

"Is that all?" laughed Olah as she paused for



breath. "I don't see why you didn't bring back a complete set of arrows already finished. But let's see your flint. You know we have had little experience with that stone, for it is scarce north of the Great Water. The Chippewas rely mainly on copper, and stones ground down with sand, for their knives, and bone for their arrow tips. How do you work it?"

"By flaking, this way," returned Wawena, selecting a thin piece of the white stone. Resting it on the heel of her hand with a fold of her buckskin dress beneath to prevent cutting, she produced a piece of deer antler found in the woods, and placed the tip against the edge of the stone. By pressing inward and downward firmly, a flake the size of a fish scale popped off and fell into her hand beneath. Another and another followed, as she worked around the edge.

"Oh, I see," said Bopo, all interest. "She just whittles it away like shavings."

"Or like a beaver gnawing a stump," suggested Olah. Wawena was a rapid worker, for she had made many heads for her foster-father, and in ten minutes a perfect article lay in her hand, sharp and serrated like a breadknife.

"There you are, the deadly Sioux arrow-head," she exclaimed as the boys gazed in



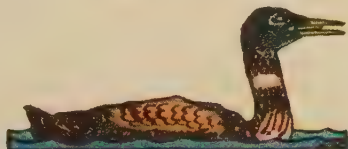
admiration. "I have seen a man shoot clean through a running buffalo's body with one of them. Now while you work out the paddles, I will flake a supply of these, ready for the arrows we can make tomorrow."

The camp was a veritable beaver colony now, with everyone working rapidly. The two boys hacked and broke away bits of wood from the boards Bopo had split, and Wawena furnished them with fresh pieces of sharp flint for scrapers and knives. With rough sandstone for rasps they went at the spruce wood, careful not to split it, and did not pause until three paddles, more or less rough, but serviceable, leaned against the cliff. When they paused for breath they realized that the day was over, the long Northern twilight had nestled down over the earth. And their noses told them that Wawena had caught more trout, which was even then sizzling over a crackling fire.

Such a supper! But they were all tired. They ached in every muscle, with an ache that told of work accomplished. It was not long before they retired, Wawena to a thick bed of balsam near the canoe, the boys on a wider bed against the cliff. Night descended. A loon laughed weirdly on the lonely lake. Olah turned over suddenly.

"Hear that, Neechee?" he whispered. "That is Mong, my Loon Father, talking to me; he says we have good medicine for tomorrow!"

"I hope you're right," said Bopo slowly, "but



today a squirrel chased a chipmunk down a pine log and bit him. The Chipmunk is my totem, and that looks like bad medicine to me—”

“Oh, you wait and see,” returned Olah, snuggling down into the pungent balsam feathers. “My Loon Father never lies.”

With the cold mists of morning numbing her nose and drenching her hair, Wawena was again the first to waken. And when the two boys stirred sleepily and yawned themselves awake, they found her rapidly peeling the furry skins from four plump rabbits.

“Wagh! Nezesheen!” exclaimed Olah, leaping to his feet and feeling somewhat ashamed that a mere girl had twice beaten him on early rising. “You’re a good trapper; change of food for breakfast, Bopo; get up!”

“And bindings for the arrow heads,” continued the girl, quickly washing and cleaning the entrails of the animals and laying them out on rocks to dry. “When twisted into cords, this is almost as good as deer sinew. But we certainly do need a deer!”

“Well, my Loon Father told me his Good Medicine talk, last night, so I feel confident that we soon shall have one.”

“But I had a terrible dream,” groaned Bopo, who was anything but cheerful this morning. His chipmunk had dashed madly across logs, in his mind, all night, screaming in terror of the huge squirrel, which had turned into the dancing head of a wicked man from time to time. The face seemed to be that of

Scar-Face, himself, which made the dream more awful than ever. "I think something is going to happen; I don't feel at all well somewhere inside."

"You're not sick. You don't look it," said Olah. "Cheer up, Neechee! That was just a dream! Let's eat and get to work on the bows!"

But Bopo did not cheer up. Throughout the meal he gazed gloomily into the fire. He ate his portion of roasted rabbit in silence, and went to the task of bowmaking with an oddly heavy heart. Towards noon his gloom had worn itself off a little, but he was not cheerful until the finished bows lay beside the paddles.

Olah's bow was widest, and had more strength; Bopo's narrower but probably more accurate, while Wawena's, built for grouse hunting and squirrels, was quite tiny in comparison with the other two. All three were flat, gradually tapering to the two tips where they were notched for the string. The bowcord was a problem, until Wawena proved that she could slice the remaining rawhide into thin strips with a flint knife and twist it in such a manner that a strong string resulted. Of course it made clumsy cords, and the arrows would have to have wide, shallow sockets, but they were better than none at all.

"Won't last a dozen shots!" exclaimed Bopo, testing his bow.

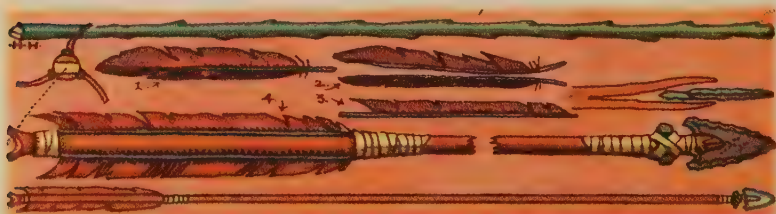
"But who needs a dozen shots?" queried Olah, stringing his weapon and testing it. "The first two shots ought to give us that deer, and then we shall

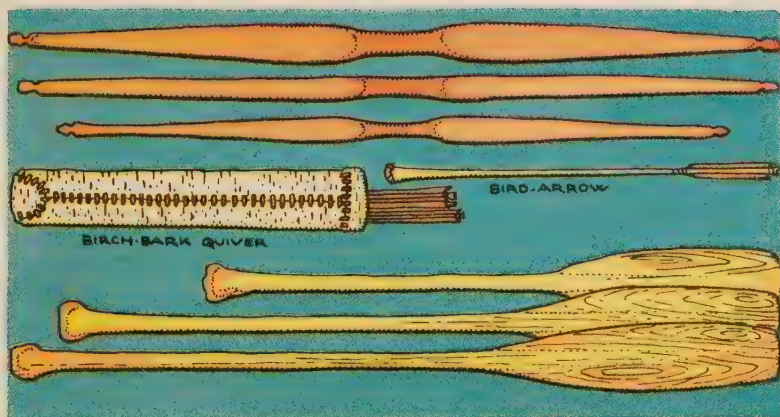


have a huge supply of everything from food and moccasins to the best bowstrings!"

"Don't count the grouse eggs until they have feathers and feet," replied Bopo, gloomily. "We have still to make the arrows."

"That's simple, for Wawena has already done most of the work," retorted Olah, and pointed to where she was straightening peeled willow shoots over a frame on the fire. Seasoned and straightened they were rubbed smooth and round with pieces of grooved sandstone, and the nocks filed in with flint. The opposite ends were split to hold the heads already made, and both tip and shaft bound securely with the improvised sinew of rabbit entrails. Three feathers from one wing of the weasel-killed grouse were selected for each shaft, and split down the midrib, after which they were trimmed and lashed above the nock with the sinew. At last Wawena found that they were out of this needed cord, but she counted with satisfaction three good hunting shafts for each boy, and four blunt-headed arrows for herself.





"Nezesheen!" crowed Olah, dancing about the paddles and finished artillery and stretching his cramped legs.

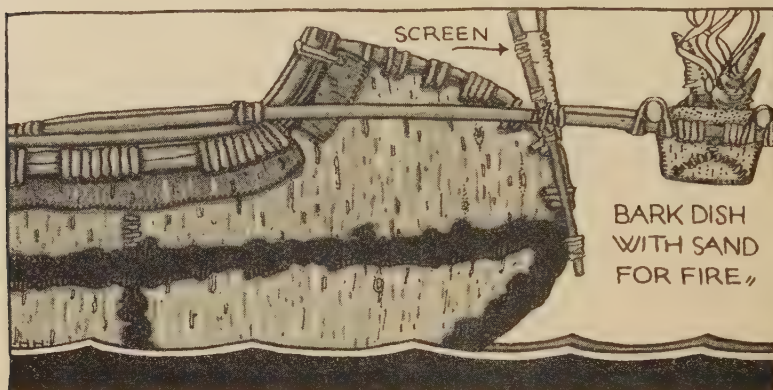
"Loon Father has made us paddles!  
He has made us bows and arrows!  
Now he will show us where the deer is!  
Now he'll kill a fine deer for us!"

"I suppose you whistle like a bird, and the deer walks into camp, and lies down and dies," suggested Bopo in a tone of sarcasm.

"No, little Face-Of-Awful-Gloom," replied Olah, "we flash him tonight when he drinks. There are many tracks by the cedar that gave us wood for our bows."

"Well, I'll help you, of course," sighed Bopo, "but I feel that something is certainly going to happen. That was a terrible dream!" he concluded, and lapsed again into the brooding mood of the early morning.

When dusk had again settled, the hunters were prepared. They climbed into the canoe, the two boys kneeling in front with ready-strung bows and placed arrows. In the bow of the canoe, hidden by



a bark screen from the eyes of the three, but flashing its yellow flower forward on the rocks and trees along the shore, glowed a torch of pine knots. Wawena paddled noiselessly from the stern, and kept close to the shoreline.

Of a sudden two spots of gold fire glowed in a cedar thicket, then went out. "Deer!" hissed Olah. "Hold it!"

Wawena backed water without a sound. Now the flecks of light showed again; the eyes of a watching buck reflected the torch. Naturally curious, and drawn to the light as a moth to the candle, the young deer cautiously stepped through the marsh grass into the still, green water among the lily pads.

Both boys aimed at the center of the half-seen chest behind the left shoulder, and pulled. The strings twanged, and two arrows flashed for an instant in the light, then vanished into the gloom beyond the circle of vision. There was a snort, a crashing of brush, then sudden and complete darkness, for the pine torch had come loose and had fallen sizzling into the water.

"Well, I'm right!" grunted Bopo from somewhere in the darkness. "My string has broken into shreds. I knew it wasn't any good! And where's your deer now? I told you something would happen! You missed him by a wide mile, too!"

Olah said nothing, but silently paddled back to camp, which they found with difficulty, the night being so dark. He was keenly disappointed. This was the first time his totem had mixed things up after a clearly defined statement. His Loon Father had talked Good Medicine to him, but it had come out as Bopo had said.

Next morning they paddled back to retrieve the arrows which must not be wasted.

"Mine ought to be here," said Bopo, leaping out of the canoe and searching the black muck of the bank. "But it isn't here; yours either! We must have shot over farther."

"Here's where the buck jumped," said Olah, pointing to the deep tracks ploughed into the moss, and then he suddenly grasped Bopo's legging fringe and almost shouted.

"There! on those leaves! Blood!"





*Two spots of gold fire glowed in a cedar thicket.*

"And across those logs, lots of it!" exclaimed Bopo, his mouth wide in astonishment. "You must have hit him!"

Wawena came running up now, but the boys were off like dogs on a hot scent. They bounded and crashed through the underbrush, following the trail in the deep moss every now and then splotted with blood. The trail led into a large windfall and did not come out.

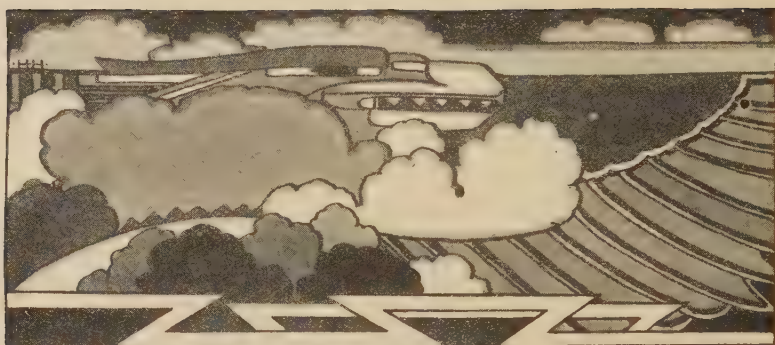
Olah danced up and down for joy. "Dead as a stone!" he called to the running Wawena.

And there, crumpled up among tangled logs, lay the body of the young deer, the broken shafts of two arrows protruding from his side. Both boys gasped.

"And I hit him, too!" cried Bopo in amazement.

"Yes, both shots into the heart, and in the half dark at that!" returned Olah. "Now whose totem was right?" he added gleefully, and prepared to skin the animal. Bopo said nothing.





## CHAPTER SIX

Soon, under the competent hands of three young Indians, what had once been a deer became jerked venison. The flesh lay in narrow, thin strips on a pole platform, drying and smoking. The boys were working the hair off the hide and tanning it with a mixture of boiled brains and liver. Later it would be smoked over a smudge fire till it turned golden brown, when it would be ready for the making of new moccasins. Wawena had twisted three perfect bowcords from the sinew, the broad band of tendon fibre lying along the back bone.

Now she was performing some witchery with fresh meat over a cooking fire. Never had anything smelled so tantalizing as that fresh grilled venison steak.

That evening, Olah sat by the fire, gazing at the results of their hard labors with a smile of satisfaction.

"Mong has been good to me," he said, "and the Great Spirit has been good to us all. In a few days we can be off. When the hide is finished we can pack our bark makaks and go."

"I am glad," said Bopo, falling into a contemplative mood. "But, while we have seemed to be under the spell of your Good Medicine, still I want to get away from this place. Something tells me that this luck cannot last. Today your loon flew away from the lake, and last night I saw Scar-Face and the Thunderbird in that terrible dream again. Ugh!" and he shivered, though it was not cold, and peered into the shadows.

"Your nerves are like your bow-string when you shot the deer," smiled his friend. "Something hasn't agreed with you lately. Too much fish, perhaps. But cheer up, you have good fresh meat from now on."

"It isn't my stomach," grunted Bopo in disgust, and said nothing more the rest of the evening.

That night Wawena lay wakeful near the rock edge, listening to the whispering water. This was a night of gladness for her. No more would she lie peering out through the smoke opening of Scar-Face's teepee till he fell asleep, awakening early to prepare his breakfast, always in dread of his tongue, his hard hand, his cruel eyes. She had planned this escape since earliest childhood, learning woodcraft from Morning Star, the captive Chippewa woman, and now she was soon to start on the journey! Scar-Face was not her father! The Bwanoz were not her people! And she was on her way to the lands of the Chippewa on the banks of the Great Water! She sighed happily and gazed across the lake.



What was that? Suddenly she sat bolt upright, for her eyes had caught a spark of light far away over the water. A fire! She rubbed her eyes and looked again. "No, how foolish!" she told herself. It couldn't be! See, there were the little fireflies playing over the swamp, and one had lost himself over the lake and had burned his torch to find his way back! Yes, that was it. Nothing to worry about. And so Wawena went peacefully to sleep, not knowing that the spark showed again and again, but never returned to the swamp.

"Well, Bopo, how is the gloom today?" Olah asked next morning as he sleepily opened his eyes. But when he turned over, his elbow rubbed against the matting of balsam branches. Bopo was not there.

"Well, of all things!" he said to himself. "Bopo beat me up this morning. Are you awake, Wawena?"

"Yes," she called back, climbing out of her brush pile. "I had the best sleep I've had for years, too," she finished, smiling and braiding her hair with the red doeskin covering.

"Bopo not there? He must be scouting for something," she added, and began arranging camp for the morning meal. "I have an idea," she continued. "There are some very good water-lily roots over past the swamp, in a lagoon. If I get some this morning and dry them, we can pound them into a flour that makes good bread. That will help our food supply on the big trip."

"That's a wonderful idea," agreed Olah. "You

take the canoe and while you are gone I'll work the hide to soften it. When Bopo returns we can all have breakfast together."

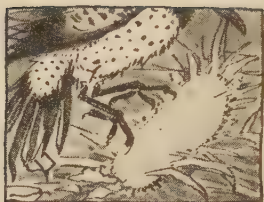
So Wawena took her bow and arrows, in case she met a duck, and climbing into the canoe, shoved off. Olah glanced up once or twice as he unrolled the skin, and saw that she had passed from sight around the bend.

"She is a wonderful girl," said Olah to himself. "Now Magpie is just her age, but Wawena knows twice as much and says little, while Magpie knows little and talks all the time! It's odd how much difference there is in girls."

These and kindred observations flitted through his head, as he washed the skin in the cold lake-water and laid it out on a rock. Today he and Bopo could finish working it over a pole, and tomorrow it could be smoked. Then they would pile all the duffle into the light canoe and be off for home! He wondered idly what kept Bopo away. It wasn't hunting, for his bow and arrows lay high on the dry rocks wrapped in moss.

Olah made the morning fire and laid some venison on a bark platter ready for broiling when the others returned. The sun was coming up, and there was a fresh breeze. They needed new cedar bark for bast and twine, and he might as well get it while he waited. So, taking his bow and arrows, he trotted into the woods.

Chipmunks played in the leaves. A flicker drummed on a log. Olah swung down a deer trail



toward him, for the wing feathers could be used for arrows. He aimed carefully at the little fellow, and dropped him fluttering in the soft earth of the trail. Stepping forward to pick up the bird, Olah saw there, beside the lifeless flicker, the clear imprint of a foot. And it was half again larger than Bopo's moccasin, and not a half hour old!

Olah froze, immobile as a stump. When he arose, it was with the wariness of a lynx. His hair prickled along his neck, and his hands were cold and clammy. There could be no other reading to this tale—a Bwanoz had crossed that deer trail, was even now, perhaps, within hailing distance! Olah was all eyes and ears now—not a fly buzzed lazily away but printed its flight across his mind. Bopo and Wawena! They would surely be back at camp now, and they must be warned! What a half-wit he had been! He had built a fire and left it to call the intruder to camp!

Olah slunk swiftly along, peering into tangles, watching every shadow for a man's form. Seeing no more signs as he neared camp, he scuttled, still crouching under the vines and over the rock edge of their own cliff. He was about to run down the slope when he stopped dead in his tracks. The camp was no more!

The fire had been scattered to the four winds. Its ashes and the poles of the drying frame were floating in the water off the ledge, where they slowly eddied in the freshening breeze. Their hard-earned venison had vanished, and the birch baskets so patiently made by Wawena and filled with provision for the long journey were crumpled and torn, and lay sadly drifting before the wind. The tanning hide was nowhere. And bleak desolation rested on the little ledge like a buzzard after a full meal.

What was he to do? Olah decided that for the moment he would remain where he was. He burrowed deep into the matted vines along the cliff top. Bopo and Wawena were still away, he felt certain. Was the camp still being watched? If so the watchers could see him when he moved. But he must warn Wawena and Bopo and he could do neither unless he remained. But *was* the camp being watched? Would it have been destroyed so utterly had the intention been to remain?

These and a hundred other questions piled into Olah's mind. He lay still for hours. Nothing happened. The sky, which had been gloriously bright, grew cloudy, low-hung layers scudding in the wind. At last he could bear the inaction no longer, and crept slowly, inch by inch, down the rocks to the ledge.

Here were signs which made his misery complete. At the edge of the rocks dangled a piece of buckskin with bits of white quillwork design on the fringe—Bopo's legging! And that bit of leather,



and the rock at the water's edge were clotted with blood. Bopo had been foully murdered and thrown into the deep water!

Olah's mind refused to work well for some time. Bopo, as far back as he could remember, had been closer to him than any brother. Their tikinagens, their very cradles, had swung from the same limb in babyhood. They had been inseparable. And now Bopo had gone to the Happy Hunting Ground! For a moment, in his anguish, Olah was about to leap into the water to follow his friend on that long journey.

But Wawena came into his thoughts again. He could not desert her. He could and would find her! So, with a last farewell to the friend who had died the death of a warrior, Olah saluted the swirling wavelets with outstretched arm.

He carefully worked around the lake to the lagoon. His way was through a cedar swamp, and going was difficult. Yet, when it loomed white ahead, he was none the wiser. There was no trace of Wawena or of the canoe. He could find no uprooted lily plants; the green pads were ruffled only by the wind. Not even a moose had fed there for days.

Olah kept circling the lake. He made for higher ground now in the hope of sighting the canoe, but the leaden water gave no sign. The sky was darkening, great black billows of cloud tumbled up from the horizon. And as he watched, he seemed to see the form of a gigantic bird with talons outstretched.



*"The Thunderbird!" he gasped.*

"The Thunderbird!" he gasped. "Is he coming to help me, or to destroy?"

Back on level ground again, Olah kept on the alert. He must find some sign before the storm wiped everything away. He was now almost opposite the place where camp had been! There it lay, four miles across the surging waters, now black with white plumes. He had covered a great distance.

It was dusk. Of a sudden, he dropped like a striking hawk into a bed of ferns. There before him, in a hollow, sheltered by a huge rock from the steadily rising wind, was a fire! In the growing darkness it sent fitful red splashes of light against the boulder. And before it, twirling a sharpened stake of green wood in the coals, his powerful bronze back toward Olah, crouched a man! The fire-smoke eddied in his face, and he turned aside to cough. Then Olah's heart skipped a beat, for across the face a livid scar ran from hair to chin.

Scar-Face! He had trailed them then! Wawena had said they were safe, and so they had built fires, smoke fires, and had flashed a deer with a torch! What folly! And now Scar-Face had killed Bopo, had destroyed their work. Olah was seething with rage. The wind rose to a steady shriek. A scud of rain swept in a grey curtain from the lake. Olah was the warrior now! He would kill this demon, once and for all, no matter what the cost!

Shifting carefully to balance his body against the wind, Olah notched an arrow. He pulled the string, but the wind took a turn and Scar-Face leaped

forward suddenly to put out the now raging and useless fire. In doing so, he placed his body behind the big rock. Olah waited but the big Sioux did not return. Olah began stalking from another direction. Circling, he came up against the wind. But through the dusk he saw, not only Scar-Face, but two more forms. One was backed against a bark lean-to, and seemed to be holding the third.

At last he reached the shelter of the boulder. Could he believe his eyes? He was not a moment too soon. One of the figures was Squint-Eye and he held the third by the arms.

It was Wawena! Squint-Eye held her while Scar-Face reached toward her face the red end of a burning stake! The demon was about to sear her eyes from their sockets!

Olah was cool now. With a cry, "Oh, Mong, help me!" he raised himself to full height and aimed at the crouched back of the Sioux. The shaft left the string just as Scar-Face lunged with the stake. With a cry the Indian stiffened and fell backward, and at the same moment Olah was blinded by a livid flash that tore the air. The whole earth seemed to burst with the explosion. The Thunderbird had struck!

Olah, cut and drenched, crawled as best he could under the rocks. Scar-Face, Squint-Eye and Wawena had been wiped away as cleanly as an eagle lifts a squirrel into the air!







## CHAPTER SEVEN

As Wawena left camp that morning, she saw Olah washing the deer skin in the lake. She paddled leisurely. Around the bend she saw a mallard duck scudding overhead, speeding from the lagoon for which she was headed, and swiftly Wawena changed her plans.

"Bopo will probably be gone for a time," she told herself. "I am not needed at camp just now. I will follow that duck's flight. Perhaps there is a larger lagoon on that side of the lake, and while I dig water-lily roots I can keep a lookout for ducks. Anyway, I ought to do some exploring, for the river must empty on that shore."

So Wawena shifted her course, and pointed the canoe bow for a string of three islands leading toward her destination. The first two were small, boulder islands covered with birch scrub. Between the

second and third she ran into shallow water dotted with the white shells of dead clams; the shallowness continued to the third island, where it developed deep mud and silt and was the bed for a dense field of young green rushes.

"Wild rice!" said Wawena. "In the autumn this must be an excellent harvesting ground. And this island, large and covered with tall pines on the south side—a perfect camping place for the harvesters. I'm sorry it isn't fall now, for rice would be a welcome change from meat. Here's a sandy beach for landing."

So saying, she ran her canoe alongside a rock, pulled it out on the shore and crept up through the pines, her bow in hand. The ground was carpeted with golden brown needles and gave no sound as she walked. Wawena surprised a partridge in a balsam thicket and her blunt arrow brought him down.

"Good medicine!" she said to herself. "Where there's one, there are more," and so she began a careful stalk of the poplar clumps, surprising one bird after another. In no time she had five, which she tied with a bit of bark twine and hung in a tree until her return.

"Ah-a," she chuckled, "if Bopo went grouse hunting this morning, I'll wager he hasn't had as good luck as this! The boys will surely be surprised; they thought it rather useless for me to have a bow. They take it for granted that only a boy can hunt, but I'll fool them. And now, what's this?"

As she crawled through a tangle of spruce, she came to a medley of broken hemlock logs that made a huge triangle; in its middle nestled a row of logs and brush so laid as to seem a natural accident. But Wawena's woodcraft instinct told her immediately that it was man's work and that it had lain thus throughout the winter. She carefully rolled one log from the top, and disclosed a layer of bark beneath, and, under that, marsh grass and flags.

"A wild rice cache!" she mused excitedly. "Some wandering Sioux were here last fall and harvested that field. This is a good place to hide it, too, away from most of the animals that might get at it on the mainland. What a find. Now we do not need lily roots, for this is much easier to carry, and can be used in so many ways. I can make cakes, and puddings, and what a meal we shall have with a partridge in it!" and she ran her brown fingers among the hard dark grains, some of them an inch long.



She edged out of the tangle, intent on finding a birch to yield bark for a makak to carry the store. Her canoe could hold it easily, although there was more than a bushel. As she hunted, her steps carried her to the mainland side of the island and here she came suddenly on mallard ducks feeding in the shore rushes. Two drifted into line and she drove an arrow into the pair and was rewarded. One drake gave a squawk and fluttered with a broken wing, but the rest flew away with a swift rush of water and wingbeats.

The wounded mallard swam in a circle. Wawena was about to dash across the island and take the canoe around to capture him, but he was already heading toward the mainland. The water on this side was shallow enough to wade, with good sand bottom and no muck beneath. So, hastily kicking off her leggings and moccasins, she laid her bow on these and leaped in.

She almost had him in her hands, but the bird gave a frantic side kick and evaded her grasp. It was a chase now. The duck hustled in erratic jerks, Wawena close behind. She was so intent on capture that she failed to realize how far she had gone, until a swift glance told her that the sand had shelved off abruptly into deep water.

She paused, but for a moment only. The duck had battled half way to the mainland now, but the deep water ended about twenty yards beyond: she could see the yellow sand again, and a rush or two marking it. She must go back to the island, quite



far away now, and let the duck escape, or swim the channel and catch him near shore. Wawena had set out after that duck, and she was going to get it. In she plunged, buckskin dress and all, and in a little time she swam to the opposite bar.

The duck was caught as it crawled limply out on driftwood. When she had killed it, Wawena hung it in a tree as she had done the partridges. Then she wrung the water out of her dripping dress and looked about. There was the river mouth, as she had guessed, rush-filled and making the sand-bar on which she had waded ashore. There was not much use in returning to camp so soon, she thought, and the canoe was pulled up on the island beach so that it would not blow away in the breeze. The camp was miles away, and there was no smoke. The boys had evidently eaten and let the fire die down. She was hungry, of course, but no matter. While here she might as well look about.

A well-defined game trail led along the bank, paralleling the river. Deer and moose were more plentiful here than on the home shore. To the left rose a steep slope with bald red rocks crowned at the top with pines. One stood out like a lone sentinel.

"If I climb that," mused Wawena, "I can get a good idea of the country and our probable route out of here." So saying, she left the deer trail and clambered up the hill. The brush did not hurt her feet; she was used to that, but the hill was steep enough to cause her to puff as she neared the top. She picked the tallest pine, a giant with branches



*She failed to realize how far she had gone.*

low down, and began to climb. As she cleared the timber below, she noticed that the sky was growing quite dark at the edge, and the wind blew so stiffly up here that she had to keep a tight grip on limbs and trunk. She must be quick for the lake would soon be choppy with waves big enough to hinder her swimming across the channel. But, now that she was up so high, she determined to see all she could.

At last she stood hugging the slender tip of the trunk. She did not look straight down, for the wind blew hard and made her giddy. By looking far out over the landscape her dizziness was overcome. To the northeast lay a vast stretch of green wilderness, mile after mile till it folded over a blue horizon. In this, like grey eggs in a mammoth nest, the lakes lay huddled together.

Their path led that way. There would be few portages until the divide was reached, but that divide was days and days away. In the other direction lay the streams and lagoons the three had traversed on the journey in, and beyond, out of sight over the skyline, lay the land of the Sioux from which they had so cleverly escaped. No, it would have been impossible for any of the plainsmen to guess their trail and follow.

But now the wind rose again with gusty breath, and Wawena's arms ached from hanging on. Those scurrying clouds meant rain! Would she be able to paddle back against the gale, even now? From branch to branch she raced, keeping her eyes upward and feeling below with her feet for each limb. At

last she found the bottom rung of her ladder, and hung to it, swaying, picking a place to drop. She let go and fell—into the crushing grip of a man!

Wawena did not cry out. She kept her head, even when she saw that her captor was Squint-Eye! A quick glance told her that he was surprised at finding her. He was painted as a scout. He had not trailed them, then, but was scouting into Chippewa territory, and had stumbled on her by chance! Then perhaps, the boys were safe! But for herself! Her valiant little heart sank.

“Ho, ho, ho!” laughed the burly Indian with an evil chuckle. “I plucked you out of the air, like a feather drifting on the wind! What luck to catch a plump partridge! Good hunting! But, where are your dog companions? Where are those two Chippewa skunks? You won’t tell me?” and Squint-Eye twined his huge fist in the girl’s hair and twisted it slowly. Wawena’s eyes filled with tears at the pain, but she gave no other sign, her lips were locked. Not if she were skinned alive and hot coals put to her quivering flesh would she tell him! Bopo and Olah would sooner or later learn of her capture and death, and they could escape! She would never, never give them away!

Squint-Eye seized a slender finger and bent it backward slowly, hissing the question again and again. Wawena could not control a dry sob that welled up in her throat, and she was certain that her finger would snap at any moment, but still she remained firm.





"Oh, well, my silent turtle," grunted the Sioux, relaxing the torture, "I know who can make even turtles speak with a loud voice! He has a better method of persuasion, and more reasons why he should apply it. Come along!" and he strode through the brush of the hillside, never relinquishing his savage grip of her hair.

Wawena stumbled forward, face down. The brute was literally pulling her through the underbrush by the scalp, and laughing gleefully as the bushes raked crooked fingers across her cheeks leaving trails of red.

As she stumbled along, the poor girl realized that they were leaving the river section. Well, this brute did not know that she had come from the island, that the canoe was there! And perhaps he might guess, from her being on the hill, that the boys were farther up the river and not on the lake. There was hope for them, then! She resigned herself to fate, and struggled blindly on under the pain of the harsh hand.

Here, on the lake at last, the wind was a gale, coming from the home-camp side. The sky was

dark, and it was late—she had been gone longer than she intended. Too long, now! Just then Squint-Eye dragged her to a standing posture, and threw her down on a couch of rough branches. She was in a bark lean-to huddled to a huge rock, and there was a stone ring where fire had been. Squint-Eye bound her ankles and wrists with thong, and started a fire.

Wawena, bruised and shaken, idly wondered how long this man had camped there. By the fire stones, black on one side only, he had been there a day before. And last night, yes, it was last night! she had seen a flame flicker across the lake! Ah, cruel spirits who had lulled her to sleep then! It had seemed a fire-fly, lost from his marsh! Had she only watched it a longer time! Ah, what a trick of fate!

She lay watching the bark of the roof flutter and flap in the gale. Through a gash in one side she saw the waves pounding the beach like a monster



serpent hurling his body forward fold on fold. She was worn out, and the rhythm lulled her into semi-consciousness. How long she lay thus she did not know, but when she awoke with a start it was almost dark, the wind had blown much of the bark from the roof, and there were two men at the fire! One of them was Scar-Face! And he was twirling a long stake in the coals! Against the rock was a small bark makak. The girl's heart stopped for an instant, for it was one from the camp, one she had filled with venison!

She was racked with fear now, but not for herself. Perhaps,—no, in all probability he had killed both boys! She closed her eyes. The two Sioux were chatting gleefully, but their words were lost in the storm.

From then on she lived as in a nightmare. She knew that she was kicked to a standing posture, her thongs cut, and that Squint-Eye held her rigid before him. She knew that the forest was rocking wildly, trees dancing together and apart like crossed knives. Among all this, the deadly serpent-eyes of Scar-Face, set in a face livid with cruelty, bore down upon her. And, between her eyes and his, coming forward on the same level, a sharpened stake of red coals hissed in the gale!

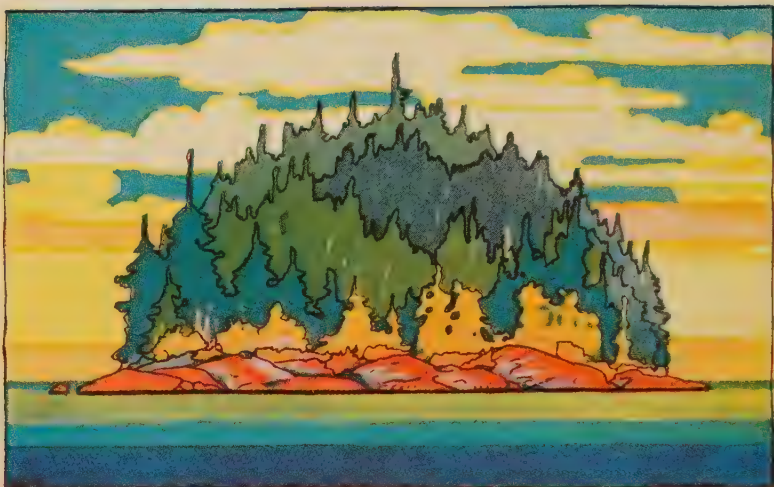
As from a weird dream, she watched it creeping closer. She grew nauseated, and would have slumped down, but for the icy grip upon her arms. This was the end—or was it only the beginning of hours of slow torture? Could Scar-Face really do this thing

to the girl who had kept his teepee in order all her life? Who had carried his parfleches unhesitatingly on weary marches through rain and snow? No! it could not be! She was dreaming! But though she blinked her eyes to take away the dream, that red gimlet was creeping closer, closer!

Then something happened. Scar-Face gave a cry and fell backward. There was a blinding flash. Squint-Eye screamed and loosed his hold. She fell and the fiery stick lay sizzling in the rain. Trees crashed. The bark shelter went hurtling into the air in torn bits.







## CHAPTER EIGHT

Rain brought Wawena to her senses. It was dashing over her in sheets. Something moved rapidly away from her and she quickly realized that, for the moment at least, she was free! Wawena broke away from the rock and, stumbling, blown by the wind and facing the blanket of rain, she groped her way in the darkness to the shore. The forest was rocking, crashing to pieces, but here she had only the wind and waves to battle. The night was so black that there was no chance of Squint-Eye following. She crept on her hands and knees.

From rock to rock, from boulder to boulder, along the beach she hurried. At times her breath fled from her lungs and left her gasping, but she fought on. Where could she go? They would find her again in the morning if she remained in the

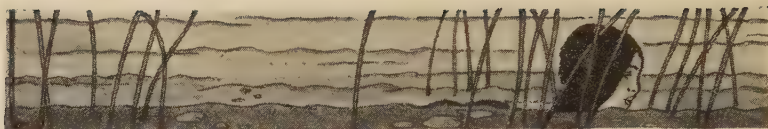
forest! The island? Could she reach the island? Not in this storm! But perhaps later, if it ever abated—

Wawena struggled on in the night. When she came to a marshy sand bar, she realized that she was at the river's mouth. The rain had slowly slackened. Where two trees had fallen, their roots, up-ended and earth covered, formed two walls and here she dragged her weary body. It was a relief to creep away from the never-ending push of wind, the steady drenching of rain. Hours went by as she huddled here.

But she dared not remain. The men would be hunting her. What had made Scar-Face fall backward? A stick, perhaps, hurled by the wind. Had it hurt him enough to make him cry out? And why had Squint-Eye dropped his hold on her arms? These questions groped their way through her brain, but found no solution. The wind was dying down.

She peered at the waves lapping the shore. Here, in shallow water, they were foam flecked. The whole bar, all the way to the island, must be a mass of foam. Not hard to battle against, in the shallow water, and affording a protection, though slight, against being seen. She hurriedly made up her mind to cross and crawled out of the shelter and into the water.

Curiously, the water was very warm. With the air so cold all about, she welcomed the warmth the lake afforded, and bent to the task. She dared not stand and wade as she had done before. She must lie low in the water and pull herself along by the



bottom, the rice stalks, the rushes. This was easy to do, and except for an occasional mouthful of froth she glided along without trouble. Her head only above the surface, she was no more visible than a swimming beaver.

\* \* \* \* \*

Olah, meanwhile, had come out into the half-light of early dawn. The experience of the last day and night weighed heavily on his mind. He was reckless now. He had killed one man, and wanted only a glimpse of Squint-Eye. He might die himself, but that demon would never live to torture Wawena!

All traces of tracks had been blown away, washed out. He crept out to the shore and, keeping an eye on the heavy timber, stalked down the beach. Here was a shelter formed by two trees blown out by the roots. What was this? In the growing light he saw a root protruding, and from it dangled a shred of buckskin. From a man's shirt? Or a woman's dress?

Olah walked inside the wall. There was nothing. Outside he carefully studied the sand, but all traces had disappeared.

Then clear and distinct, he heard the call of a loon! His totem! That was good medicine! It came again, a liquid, laughing call. But there was something odd about it. It did not seem quite natural.

He peered across the water. There was an island, not far out in the grey light. Rocks and trees. But look! There, near the shore, an upright figure standing for an instant. Not a man, but a girl. Wawena!

Quickly Olah leaped into the water. It was shallow. There could be no doubt about it. Wawena had crawled to the island and escaped. He lay down and pulled himself along. There was a deep channel that gave no trouble beyond a vigorous spurt of swimming, and he continued on through the rushes. What a girl! How cunningly she had escaped. She was a very fox for cunning! The island took on shape and grew larger as he wormed his way along, and at last a small brown hand parted the shore bushes and helped him in behind a leafy screen to dry land.

The two celebrated their reunion near the rice cache, where they ate ravenously some of the raw grouse which Wawena had shot, and recounted their adventures to each other. Bopo had been killed, and they were now alone in the great wilderness.

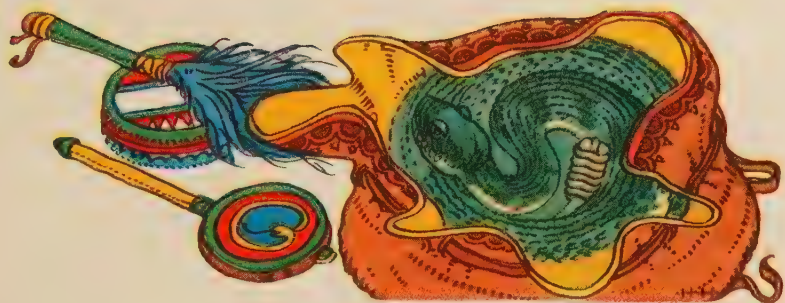
Olah went into the thickets to pray for Bopo. He asked the Great Spirit to be kind to the boy journeying into the Happy Hunting Grounds, and called on his Loon Father to guide Bopo into sunny forests. Wawena cried to herself and made offerings of grouse and rice for her friend's spirit, should it become hungry. But not for long did these two remain sad. Bopo had died a true warrior, and they themselves were confronted with the difficult problem of keeping alive.



But it would not be so difficult, they found, if each was careful. By taking turns at guarding the mainland side of their island, night and day, they could shoot Squint-Eye before he reached their shore by way of the sand bar. It was probable that he had no canoe. Certainly there had been no time for him and Scar-Face to make one since leaving the Sioux village.

Their own canoe had been blown high into the soft balsam thickets, and, except for a few rips that could be easily patched with bast and tree gum, it was in perfect condition. This meant that they had their freedom, and could leave for their long journey when the siege was over. Meanwhile, the remaining grouse and wild rice gave them the finest supply of food, and off one shore of their retreat the fish were plentiful, but they would not dare to build a fire for a week. On taking full survey of their advantages, the two Chippewas felt more safe and secure than they could have hoped.

"They were painted for war, but as war scouts," Wawena was saying. She and Olah had finished the second grouse and were resting on the sunny pine needles overlooking their land shore. "It is my opinion that they had begun a scouting trip of their own into the Chippewa country. I know of no plans among the Sioux for a war this year. They were probably bent on a private war of their own. At home those two were always going off together for weeks at a time, burning and murdering, returning sometimes with scalps. Nobody knows what devilry



they did by themselves. But always before they went, and after they returned, the snake bag was in the teepee—”

“Snake bag?” queried Olah in surprise. “What’s that?”

“Well, Scar-Face’s totem was the rattlesnake. He worshipped snakes. And he and Squint-Eye caught them, and kept them, as I say, in a leather bag. I was always afraid. Even the others of the tribe did not know about it, and Scar-Face said he would kill me if I ever told. I do not know what he did with them, but I am quite sure he used them for black magic. And not for Chippewas alone, either.”

“You mean that he may have used them against others of the tribe? Hatched up charms and used them against his personal enemies?”

“Just that. I told you how Morning-Star, my Chippewa friend, died slowly. I am sure it was because of Scar-Face’s evil works. And one time a Sioux beat him at running, and taunted him about it. The Sioux died. There were others, too. I could tell

much. I think that most of our people were afraid of him, though nobody said so, for he was considered a great warrior. There was only one thing that could frighten him, and then I have seen him cower under the blanket like a woman. They say that in a certain battle, he killed a woman in a cruel manner, and a storm came up suddenly, and that, as he raised the scalp, a flash of lightning burnt it out of his hand and seared his face."

"Then that's the scar!" cried Olah. "The lightning!"

"Yes," continued Wawena. "And ever after that time, whenever there was lightning, he came into the teepee and covered his head."

"The Thunderbird!" cried Olah, jumping up and forgetting to eat his grouse leg. "Can't you see? It is the Thunderbird! The claws of the Thunderbird have raked his face! The Great Thunder lives by destroying serpents! And Scar-Face has become a serpent by his associations with them! The Thunderbird seeks to destroy him for his evil works. And now it is all clear to me! I saw the great wings of the spirit in the black clouds. And as I shot the arrow at Scar-Face's back, the lightning flashed. Now, did I kill him, and did Squint-Eye drag him into the forest to bury him? Or, did the Great Thunder wipe them both from the earth?"

"I don't know," sighed Wawena. "I never thought of that



before. But, since you mention it, Scar-Face would never allow anyone in the teepee who had the emblem of the Thunderbird on any of his decorations. That must be it! They must have been taken away by the Thunderbird, the great ruler of the Upper Air. But all I know is that after the flash of light I saw Scar-Face no more, and Squint-Eye had vanished."

Olah thought of this for a long time. "At any rate," he said, "we won't sleep without one of us watching that shore. We'll take no chances. And if, in a week, we have seen no sign, we'll start on the long journey."

For days Wawena and Olah slept and recuperated their spent strength. They shot an occasional duck of a morning from the wild rice stalks, and they ate rice soaked in water. At the end of a week it seemed probable that the evil ones had vanished, for not a sign had they seen, and the deer and moose waded the shore undisturbed.

So, one night, with the canoe mended and new bark makaks filled with rice, duck and grouse, they pushed off from their sunny beach and started the long journey. Fearfully, noiselessly, they worked into the river, and wended their way upstream, but no arrow whizzed over their bow, and no hideous war-whoop split the air. Every paddle stroke took them away from the possibility of being caught. It was with a feeling of thankfulness, yet with deep regret, that they watched their lake drop out of sight in the darkness.





*The streams withered away to threads.*

Days passed. Some were sunny, some were stormy, with the lakes whipped into froth and the rivers into demons. But somehow the two lost and lonely Indians felt strength from the storm. As Olah said, "The Thunderbird has spread the shadow of his wings for our protection." And so they did not dread the lightning. Eastward, ever eastward they pressed, the portages growing longer and more frequent. But at last they could go no farther, the streams withered away to threads bubbling out of moss-bedded rocks, and they knew that they had reached the Divide.

Useless, now, to carry the canoe. There might be days, weeks before they struck another water system large enough to hold and float a canoe. So, abandoning their old friend in a poplar grove, they entered the forest.

There were no trails. Sometimes they walked on springy needle carpets, sometimes they pried and pushed each other through tangles of creepers and vines and sometimes they were almost mired in the black ooze of treacherous swamps, but still they struggled on. After days they came to a brook dashing madly down a long slope, and at the other end, glinting copper in the sun, a lake. They had struck water that somewhere, sometime, must empty into Kitchi-Gami, the Great Water, and their task was now to follow its course.

Here Olah stumbled on a find. It was the cut stump of a sapling. Beavers had not done it, for it had been cut from one side only. And near it was

a trail tree. The tree had been twisted into a loop when young, and by a Chippewa. Olah gave a whoop of gladness. They were in Chippewa country!

For the rest of that day they followed the old trail, overgrown with alders and briars. It followed the hills and skirted the lakes. Near nightfall Olah found a discarded moccasin, thrown away that very spring. And farther on, a bit of buckskin with a rain-draggled feather fluttered above his head.

"We are coming to some kind of Chippewa camp," said Olah in an excited undertone. "See, this trail has been used this summer!"

That night they camped on the beach that had been used but three days before by men in canoes, and the portage trails were freshly dug up by trampling feet. And, when they awoke early to continue their search, Olah saw a flare of red in the sky which was not due to the sunrise, and both smelled smoke.

Olah was happy now, and Wawena looked less serious as the forenoon wore away. Fresh evidences of man came every moment, and there was smoke in the air. Olah trotted with Wawena at his heels. Somewhere ahead was a village, and help, and a welcome!

The boy stopped to tie a tattered moccasin thong, and Wawena pressed ahead of him. When he came toward her, she was standing like a statue at the crest of the hill. And when he drew near, he saw that she was as one turned to stone. Her face was blanched, and her eyes, filled with unspeakable horror, were fixed on the little valley before her.

Olah leaped to her side. There was a sudden startled cawing of crows and a black swarm of the birds rose like a cloud of death from the plain. Before the two young Chippewas lay the desolate remains of a village.

Twenty wigwams only the day before had nestled securely on the shore of a beautiful lake. Now all were in ashes, a spiral of grey smoke winding lazily from one or two of the charred heaps. Scattered here and there, piled in groups of twos, fives and sevens, lay the fresh corpses of the dead. The Chippewas had been massacred and scalped to a man!

This, then, was the village, and this their welcome.

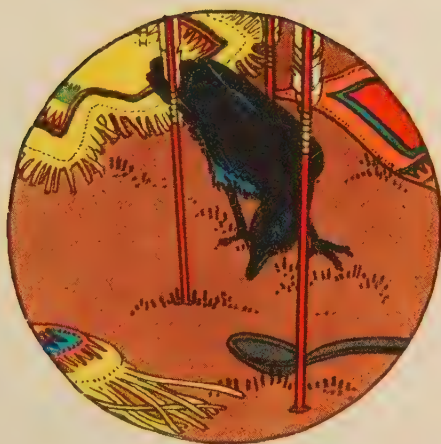
"The work of the Bwanoz," said Wawena simply, pointing to the feathered end of an arrow driven deeply into a man's chest. She turned away sick at heart, and Olah sat down suddenly on a log.







*With a curdling cry he leaped downward among the slain.*



## CHAPTER NINE

Cawing, croaking and screaming, the cloud of wheeling crows settled closer and closer over the field, where they had been interrupted at their ghoulish feast. The boy and girl watched them wheeling, dropping, one by one.

Olah could stand it no longer. With a curdling cry he leaped from the grassy hill crest and hurtled downward among the slain, and the black cloud rose again with a sound of many wings and circled high above the tree-tops. Hardly had he come to a full stop on the fire-singed plain than he heard a low moan. He listened.

"Wawena," he called softly, motioning her, "I heard a moan," he whispered. "Someone here still lives! We must find him quickly!"

The girl could hardly relish her task now, but she bravely assisted Olah as he searched.

It was Wawena's first view of a battle-field. Now she better understood the utter savagery of the war parties she had watched returning from Sioux raids. Such, indeed, must the field have looked when her own parents were slain! And born in her breast to remain forever was a deep hatred of those whose business in life was war!

"Ugh!" exclaimed Olah, turning over the lifeless bodies. "The devils! They attacked at early dawn, when everyone was asleep, or just arising. They gave the Chippewas no chance! If I ever see a Bwanoz again—"

Olah had come to the wreck of a wigwam. The poles still stood, and one side had not burned. Here among a mass of fallen bark and rush mats, makaks and household gear lay two Chippewas. One, a young man, was dead beyond possible doubt. But as he struggled with a roll of bark roofing on the other, Olah heard again that shuddering groan. Wawena and Olah worked frantically, and at last the heavy apakwa was thrown back. There lay a man, seemingly dead, but the eyes in his pain-drawn face were open and his lips moved!

Olah bent his head to the lips. "Water!" they feebly whispered, and then the eyes lighted with a glare of hate, and closed again. The voice came stronger now, "I take no favor from a Bwanoz!"

"I am a Chippewa," cried Olah. Wawena ran to the lake, returning with a charred basket spouting water from a dozen cracks. Olah dashed a handful into the pain-worn face, and tilted the vessel to the

parched lips. "I am a Chippewa! I am a Chippewa!" the boy kept repeating.

At last the man came to his senses enough to gasp a few words. "This morning—all asleep—Bwanoz!" he paused for breath, then continued. "Almost two thousand!" he went on. "I am a scout, from the Big Water—Huge war party of Sioux going on to massacre main settlements! Seven hundred canoes!" he paused for breath, and Olah gave him more water, and eased his tortured head on a flap of buckskin from a woman's dress.

"At the Big Village most of the men have gone on a long hunt for copper," he managed to say, "towns defenceless! Must be warned! Sioux taking the longest way to reach Great Water; you have time to warn them if you follow the short trails—"

"But what are the short trails?" groaned Olah in a frenzy of mental agony. "We are lost, have been lost for months—"

"Raise me up—I will draw map—" the dying man gasped. Olah raised him gently to a sitting position, while Wawena pressed a charred stick into his failing grasp, and arranged a fold of a woman's dress across his knees. He was breathing heavily now, but struggled desperately. His trembling hand made a circle on the skin, and a black dot on one edge. "This town—" he hissed, growing feeble suddenly. "From here secret trail—" but he got no further. With a sudden gasp he sat upright, then fell limply backward, his face rolling into the parched grass and his chest across Olah's knees.



"He's dead!" cried Wawena, and Olah slowly nodded, covering the gashed head with the buckskin fold. "And now we are in a worse predicament than before! The Sioux are advancing on the main city, and we have no way of warning the Chippewas! Oh, are we never to reach living Chippewa people?"

Olah's heart was heavy within him. From this village led a "secret way" that shortened the distance, but where was it, and whither did it lead? Was it a canoe route, or a trail? Oh, if the good spirits could have interfered for only a moment, if the man could have lived but a short time longer! Suppose he and Wawena were to push on blindly, might they not strike the Sioux party and be killed in turn, of no help to the hundreds of women and children about to meet death at the hands of two thousand savage enemies?

As these thoughts circled in his head, even as the crows circled high above, a hoarse cry came from the edge of the woods. It rose and grew in volume until it eddied in a crescendo of wavering shrieks. Wawena sprang to Olah's side in fright. It was a war-whoop, a shrill, piercing, blood-curdling war-whoop! And as it still hung in the clearing like a livid cloud, a figure broke away from the green shrubbery and staggered out on the field. One arm was upraised, and in the right hand dangled a tuft of black hair which showed red from time to time.

"He has a scalp!" gasped Wawena, but Olah was already in action. His bow was bending, the



arrow was pulled to his chest, but he did not loose. Something about the figure and the way it staggered made him pause. And the next instant he gave a shout which startled Wawena more than the war-whoop had done.

"Bopo!" cried Olah, and ran headlong across the plain.

Indians seldom cry, but that meeting left each of the three with moist eyes. When the embraces were over, Wawena cried out, "Bopo! you are hurt!" And, indeed, one side of Bopo's face was red from a cut in the scalp, and Bopo seemed still partly dazed from the blow.

"See, a scalp!" he cried, and Olah, looking on his friend, could not remember having seen his eyes so filled with hatred. "I took it with my own hands!" he continued, gazing in a dazed fashion at his left hand as it still retained a bloody copper knife, and at his right, still gripping the tuft of hair and skin. The others tried to soothe him, but he would not be soothed.

"I saw him murder four women in cold blood, and then he came for me. I ran, picking up this knife from the ground. He chased me into the forest, and I laid a trap for him! I bent down suddenly and tripped him, but he struck my head with his axe going down. I must have lain unconscious for a long time. But, when I awoke just now, I found that my arm had been thrown forward, and he had fallen on it. This knife had entered his heart. I had killed him, and so I took his scalp! I thought the battle still going on and returned to die with my people. I am too late! But," he cried, rising unsteadily to his feet and facing the desolate village, "hear me, oh Chippewas who are marching to the Happy Hunting Grounds! I, Bopo, have avenged four deaths! I have killed a Bwanoz for my people!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Bopo lay that afternoon far from the scene of disaster, while Wawena dressed his cut with herbs and bandaged it with strips from her skirt. It was nothing, he had been more stunned than cut, and would be well in an hour. Even now he had regained his memory, and talked rapidly of the events leading from his disappearance, weeks ago, to his present adventure.

Olah was dressing a rabbit he had shot.

"But why did you get up from the bed that morning when you did? You say it was before daylight?" Olah questioned.

"Yes," returned Bopo, "I am going to tell you. I had had a bad dream, several days before, you

remember, of my Chipmunk totem being chased by a squirrel. It meant bad medicine, I thought, and I still think so. For I have had nothing else ever since. That last night, after you both went to sleep, I closed my eyes, and tried with every means to lull myself away. I dozed fitfully, but every time I began drifting away, I saw things too terrible to talk about, and awoke each time.

"This kept up for most of the night. Finally I got up quietly. 'It's no use,' I said to myself, 'I shall wake them all if I cry out in my dreams, and they need sleep.' So I went down to the beach.

"I thought a swim might do me good, and plunged in. I felt hot all over, but the cool water seemed to soothe me. However, I had a cramp in one leg, and got out just in time. The water was deep there, but, luckily, I had not gone far out. After I had massaged my leg, I felt a chill creeping over me from head to feet. 'This will never do,' I said, and clambered off the rock.

"I struck a deer trail that was more or less open, and began running. How far I ran I don't remember, but I know that I fell several times, and on picking myself up at one time I noticed that I had lost most of one side of my right legging, where the fringe had caught. I thought of returning for it, but the chills came again, and I ran on."

"That's why I found your legging fringe at the camp and thought you had been killed," broke in Olah. "Scar-Face must have found it. But why was it all bloody?"



"That must have been part of his scheme," interrupted Wawena. "He probably wanted to terrify the rest of us, and spilled grouse blood, or the blood of a rabbit on the rock. But what happened after that?"

"Well, I had a high fever by that time. I knew then that I was really ill. I turned around to go back to camp, but couldn't walk. I had pain in my stomach, and rolled myself up on some moss at the foot of a hollow tree, cold, hot and thoroughly miserable.

"When morning came I heard footsteps and thought it might be a deer. I was concealed and away from the deer trail which I had left shortly after my first run. As I watched I knew that my Chipmunk had really warned me, for there passed by me, within touching distance almost, our old enemy, Scar-Face!

"I tried then to pull myself together, but I was in agony. It was impossible for me to walk, and so I crawled. I wanted to get to camp to warn you that Scar-Face was in the vicinity, but knew you must be awake, and that if he saw me I was a dead Chipmunk, for I couldn't run. I began to circle, keeping away from the direction in which he had traveled. I ended in the ooze of a bog, and between that and the fever, the day wore on without my reaching camp.

"As I lay on a log, I remembered one thing, however, and that gave me some consolation. Scar-Face was painted for war, and he wouldn't have been thus painted had he been merely chasing us. So, I reasoned, he had no idea that we were on the lake. He was perhaps on a raiding party of his own.

"As afternoon wore on, the wind increased, and it grew colder. I finally reached camp, but imagine my dismay when I found it broken up completely."

"I certainly can," put in Olah, "for that was what I found, too. Scar-Face made quick work of it. I presume he had hidden away, and was waiting for me while I lay in the vines on the cliff top. But go on."

"I was certain then that things had come to their worst. I could not find the canoe and thought that perhaps he had killed you both and thrown you into the lake, then taken the boat and paddled away. The wind was violent now, and it must have blown the piece of my legging away from the water, for I did not see it. But Scar-Face had overlooked one thing, and that was my bow, up under that rock ledge and wrapped in moss. I took it down and tried my best to locate some tracks that might show what had happened.

"By that time it was dark, and the wind and rain hit with such force that I knew it was of no use to search. I dug in under the cliff where I was somewhat protected, and then the storm came. I was sick all that night, and for days after. I do not know how long it was after that when I at last came out of the hollow in the rocks. I worked around the lake, but found no sign of anything except trees and wreckage. I felt certain that you were dead."

"And all this time we had thought you dead, while we were well cared for on our island," said Olah. "Your bad medicine was certainly powerful!"

"But then it seemed to change. I felt stronger and I killed a deer in the forest. I made a carrying basket and struck out for the east, by the sun and moss on the trees. I just kept going, that's all, for weeks. At last I knew I was over the Divide, and then I struck some Chippewa trails which led me to the village."

Here he paused. Olah was roasting the rabbit, and Wawena changed the bandage on Bopo's head. The wound was much better even now, under her care.

"I was well cared for. I told them all that had happened, and suggested that Scar-Face might have been scouting for a larger war party, but they all laughed. They said the Chippewa scouts had reported that the Sioux were going to move west after the spring, as usual, and there was no danger expected this year."

"It must either have been suddenly planned, or secretly carried out," exclaimed Wawena, "for even the Sioux women and children knew nothing of a war party of this size being organized. Most of them must have come from the villages farther west."

"At any rate I was cared for for two days, and had planned to go on to the Great Water and our main camps with some copper traders by way of the secret trail they have here—"

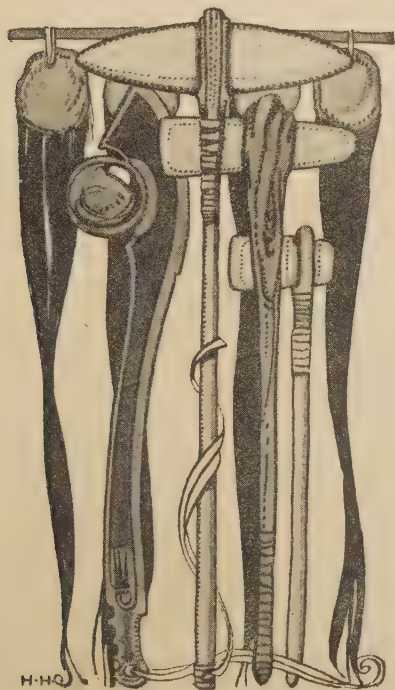
"Secret trail!" exclaimed Olah, alert and excited. "Bopo, do you know where the secret way is from this village?"

"Why yes," said Bopo, "I learned it but yester-

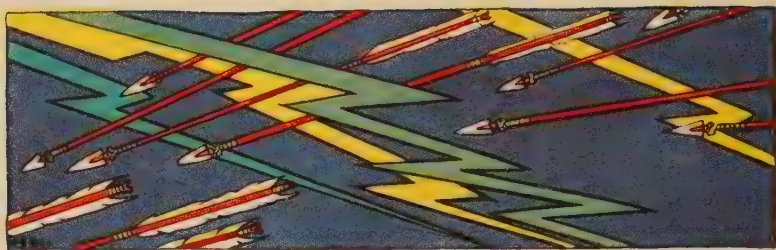
day, and was all ready this morning to start, when those Bwanoz devils struck, just before dawn. The rest is confused until you came—”

“But, Bopo! Are you well enough to guide us? We must save our people if we can! A dying man told us that this party was on its way to the Great Water—”

“What?” almost screamed Bopo, who had suddenly grasped the situation. “We will start right away!” and he leaped to his feet.







## CHAPTER TEN

The three quickly ate their meal, for they needed all possible strength for the task to come. Bopo started in the lead. Their way was not along a trail, but through the woods, over rocks, roots and fallen timber. They were going away from the lakes and rivers, into higher ground, and though Olah could not see it, he sensed that somewhere ahead was a high ridge.

After a while the trees opened before them, and they found themselves on a rock ledge. Woods and lakes, and the usual network of waterways spread before them in an unending panorama to the east. Bopo pointed.

"The Sioux war party will have to follow that chain for two days," he said, "before they come to the big river flowing into the Great Water at the main settlement. They know the routes only from directions given them by their scouts, and will be cautious in going forward, for they do not wish to have word of their coming go before them. That is why they took no captives in this raid, but killed everyone. We can beat them, though!" and he smiled a grim smile.

"But how can we hope to outdistance them on foot?" cried Wawena, gazing over that vast expanse spread out beneath. "They have canoes and a long start. We would need wings to overtake them!"

"Follow me," said Bopo confidently, "for though I have never been here before, I was taught this trail yesterday by one of the principal old men of the village, and I shall not soon forget it. But do not talk to me from now on until I give the sign, for I must concentrate."

Down over the ridge they went now, and there before them opened a deep cleft in the solid rock. There seemed to be nothing below except gravel and rock debris, but Bopo swung over the edge and began a descent. It was difficult, and several times they had the feeling that one step missed would be the last.

At the bottom grew a few clumps of small bushes. An old stump that had fallen into the cleft leaned against the east wall, and Bopo ran up to it.

"Yes, this is it," he said in a whisper, and after scanning the cliff top carefully to make sure that they had not been followed, edged the stump away slightly. There was an opening large enough for a man to enter on his hands and knees!

"Follow me now, and don't be afraid, but don't talk," Bopo commanded his friends, and in they went, Wawena in the center. Olah, at the rear, replaced the stump. Forward through the dim light of the tunnel they pressed, until gradually everything was velvet black. The floor of the tube was

solid rock and did not hurt their hands, but, once in awhile, a projecting piece from the roof touched Bopo on his sore head, and he warned the others to be careful.

Onward they went for some moments. They must be at the center of the ridge now, Olah thought. There were turnings to right and to left, and Olah guessed the reason for Bopo's order not to bother him when they passed three entrances to other tunnels. Bopo was steering them now by simply remembering a series of numbers drilled into him by the old man. Three turns right. One entrance. Four turns left. Two entrances. And so on. One slip and they were lost completely.

After several such turnings there was a noise, and Wawena whispered back to Olah in a frightened voice, "Bopo has fallen through a hole!"

"Well, wherever he is, we've got to follow," replied Olah, and so Wawena shut her eyes and crawled on. She lay on her stomach, and fairly dropped head first down a chute! A broken neck seemed certain, but at the end of a breath-taking slide she began shooting upward once more, and came to rest in a dusky cavern lighted by a dull glow from far, far above. With a rush Olah landed beside her.

"Wagh!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper against her ear. "That was a ride!"

When their eyes had become accustomed to the light, they saw Bopo some distance away. He seemed to be lifting something. They heard a splash of

water, and in a moment he appeared in a canoe! They were on the bank of a subterranean stream!

"This cave was found generations ago by medicine men!" Bopo explained. "The materials for the canoes are dropped each year through the opening far above which you can't see, and five canoes are made here and cached by old men. Where the others are kept I do not know, but finding this was easy. Now comes the difficult part. This stream shoots almost straight for miles, through a tunnel, and we shall be going at breakneck speed. So don't raise your arms or heads! The canoe is built very strongly for the ride. Then we come to a series of subterranean lakes. Then other tunnels. We make a short journey underground and in three hours we do the traveling of a whole day overland!"

All three lay down in the bottom of the craft, and the current began whisking them along. Faster and faster they went. It was a weird sensation, this hurtling through solid rock in a fragile bark shell, with water boiling beneath and on both sides. The gunwales scraped from time to time, but the pace quickened, and when the first lake was reached, dimly lighted again by that gloomy dusk from above, they had shot so far across it that there was not much need of paddling. Olah and Wawena said not a word, for Bopo was concentrating again. There were so many chances for mistakes, and not only their own lives but the lives of most of their tribe depended on the outcome of the ride.

At last, after years of time had elapsed, it



seemed, they came to a cave with no outlet. The water here was light blue, the clearest blue they had ever seen, making the entire cavern alive with a strange blue light. Bopo pulled the canoe out on a shelf.

"See?" he said, pointing, and there were hundreds of canoes, some new and some rotting away, stacked one on another against one side. "Those are from others who have taken this ride. No canoe ever gets outside this cave."

"But do we?" asked Olah dubiously, gazing about for a sign of an opening and finding none whatever.

"Yes, if you do just as I say. The water is cold as ice, but we must dive. We must dive fifteen feet down on one side, and then swim under the rock, and we come out into a lake."

"Br-r-r!" shivered Wawena as she felt of the water. But in they went. Down, down, down! Wawena was certain she would never reach the end of the dive. Both boys were swimming downward now, clearly visible in this weird blue light. Olah saw Wawena pause and struggle, and turning over caught her by the hair just in time to prevent her body from popping back to the surface. He caught the top of the rock opening below, and by sheer strength of his young arms forced them both through. A few kicks and they were beyond the opening on the other side, and hurtling upward to the surface. They all hung to the edge of a rock shelf, dripping and gasping for breath.

"Well, this is the worst," said Bopo, assisting Wawena out of the chill water. It was late afternoon, but they were in the welcome sunshine again, and their eyes ached from the glare of it. But when they could see once more, a beautiful lake lay before them, with a river leading out of it behind islands.

"We have beaten the Sioux! We have beaten them by one whole day, and now the rest is a matter of rapid paddling. There is a canoe cached on this side."

Bopo found the canoe, with paddles cached in another place, and the three bent to the task.

The Great Water only one day! They would make it in one night! Flash, flash, went the paddles as the afternoon drew to a close. The sun sank among the trees in a pool of blood, and they put fresh vigor into their strokes. Dusk crept like a ghost out of the east, and the night spread a net of stars to catch them, but still they forged ahead. The moon, full now, showed them portage trails, and never had a canoe seemed so light!

Morning came with a blood-red sky, and red-dened arrows of light shooting between tree trunks. But it showed the two boys what they had taken months to find through toil and hardship,—the far-flung cliffs of their own home, and the Great Water lying on his sanded bed and spreading his scaly back to the sun!

Along the shore at the base of high rocks lay the peaceful and unsuspecting city of the Chippewa, the bark wigwams clustered like a swarm of white moths

against the red cliffs. Olah, at the stern, sent the canoe hurtling for the wide beach.

"The Bwanoz! The Bwanoz!" Bopo yelled at the top of his voice as the craft sped inward, and a mob of men, women, children and dogs came running up from every direction.

"Olah, Bopo!" cried out a voice, and Aunt Otter Woman came weeping to clasp them in her arms. "I thought you were killed long ago!"

This was not a time for weeping, but for action.

Soon the great drum in the main lodge was booming the alarm. Men in the forest, starting on journeys or the hunt, were turned back. Women ceased their labors and packed belongings into bundles. Boys and girls brought out arrows and knives, tomahawks and clubs. Dogs howled and were kicked aside to howl more loudly. A seeming pandemonium reigned, but guiding everything were the patient chiefs, and each man was given orders.

Meanwhile the boys hastily explained their adventures to excited friends and relatives, and Wawena was taken in by Aunt Otter Woman. No one was inactive, and Wawena tied bundles of clothing and food rapidly.

"There seems to be a quarrel at the big lodge," cried Bopo coming into the wickiup where Olah was laying out his best tomahawk and seeing to his arrows. "The chiefs are all for getting to the cliff-tops and fighting from there, as the town has only seven hundred men! The others have gone into the east for copper!"

"Well, isn't that all right?" returned Olah, swinging his club at an imaginary enemy. "That would give a great advantage to us, because we could roll down stones—"

"But there are almost two thousand Sioux!" cried Bopo. "They could starve us out and overwhelm us by sheer numbers! That's what the medicine men say, and there's the quarrel between them and the chiefs!"

"What do the medicine men intend doing?" queried Olah, rebinding a loose feather hurriedly.

"They say that the Sioux will probably come down in light, river-model canoes, two men in each for swiftness and quick portage. So they want to put all the women and children on the sand island in the bay, and fight from our Great Water ten-man canoes!"

"But," remonstrated Olah, "the small craft could run rings around the big canoes and shoot us all down with arrows. Besides, ten men in slow moving canoes are a bigger target than small canoes with only two!"

"And that's just what the chiefs say, but the high priests are making a big ceremony to the Thunderbird! They say that they have signs, magic omens from the Sacred Medicine Bundles that the Great Spirit will help us, but only if we take to the water! I am going back to find out what they have decided. Every minute counts now, because the Bwanoz are sure to come before long!"

Bopo joined the crowd gathered before the main





council lodge. Silence was over all. Would they take to the hills, where reason told them they would be safe, or would they obey the whims of the priests and go to almost certain death on the Great Water?

Of a sudden the huge drum thundered. Once, twice, three times, and then a long roll. Men came dashing out of the lodge. Women took up the cry, and the crowd surged forward. "To the canoes!" was on everyone's lips!

Canoes were loaded with everything portable, and in fifteen minutes there was nothing left of the village. The lodges were struck down to leave no shelter for the enemy, and a steady stream of the huge craft worked out to the long, narrow sand spit, where a barricade of sand was thrown up. Behind this the women and children huddled, digging deeper every hour, entrenching. The men picked out the seventy best canoes, and painted their faces, donned their finest eagle plumes and greased themselves for battle. In the heart of each was dire misgiving, and there ran a murmur among some of them that the priests were mad. But they sang their songs, and danced their war-dance there on the sands, and when the afternoon wore on each man was filled with a spirit of battle.

Bopo was standing on the extreme landward edge of the island, with Olah next to him. Because

of their experiences, they had been assigned two places in one of the canoes. They had been given the places of men!

"Well, Bopo, it's a fine day for a battle," said Olah, gazing at the calm blue sky and the sun, and fleecy summer clouds sailing overhead. "Tonight we feast, or go to the Happy Hunting Grounds. You have been my friend, and I hope that I have been yours."

"The best a fellow ever had," replied Bopo, listening to the din of chant and drums. "If we die, we die fighting! But we have faced death before, and we are not afraid!"

"Nor am I afraid," smiled Wawena behind them. "But I know that the Chippewas will win!"

Now a murmur ran among the crowd, swelling to a roar. "The Bwanoz!"

There they came! Their scouts had found none left at the village site, and now in a great half-moon, swarming out of the river mouth into the bay moved seven hundred and fifty canoes, dark against the sun. Their paddles blinked, two to every craft, and as they emerged from the river the half-moon extended. They were going to circle the island!

The Chippewa canoes had already taken to the water. Olah grasped his paddle and laid his tomahawk in front of him. Bopo, behind, his head still bandaged, laid out the copper knife which had served him so well. And with a roar the heavy vessels churned the water and started for battle.

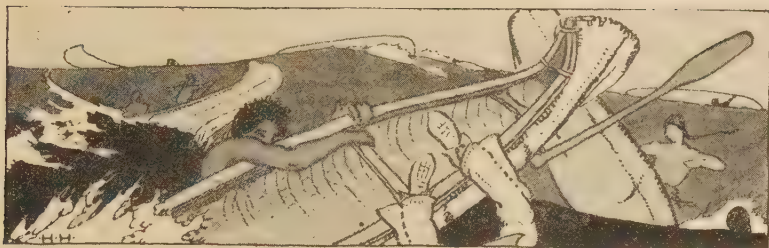
In the first canoe, now, the Great High Priest

stood up. Olah saw that in his hands was the sacred medicine bundle. He was praying to the Thunderbird, and his chant rose and fell in rhythm to the swish of the spruce paddle blades. The Sioux were still a mile away, but coming closer every moment. The horns of the half-moon kept extending. Would they never stop? Canoe after canoe shot out from the mass, and the Chippewas, extended in arrow-head formation, felt doubtful. More Sioux canoes crept out, and longer grew the line. But the Great High Priest, chanting always, never wearied. Was he mad, indeed?

Suddenly Olah, fascinated by that creeping line of death hemming them in, felt his breech-cloth tugged from behind, and heard Bopo's voice in his ear.

"Look behind us!" he cried, "The Thunderbird, who has followed us with two storms, is sending us another!"

Olah glanced back. Out of the east, as suddenly, almost, as a fire is extinguished, great clouds were creeping over them. It seemed to Olah that again he saw the form of a gigantic bird, his black wings billowing, his neck outstretched. From those wings now came a crashing roll of thunder, and the High Priest's voice followed it in a cry of thankfulness! For the lake, the Great Water, was whipped to fury as by one single blow. And the Chippewas, seeing their advantage, dashed madly forward on the wind, sounding their blood-freezing war-cry! The enemy was in their power!



“Look, Olah!” cried Bopo’s frenzied voice. “The canoes of the Sioux go over in the wind as though they were rolling logs! There goes another! There go dozens! And ours are as staunch as fat geese riding on a pond!”

The Chippewa vessels rode down the diminishing line of overturning canoes. Tomahawks split the air in wide arcs. Arrows hissed from taut strings. Lances leaped into the scudding rain to find a body struggling in the foam, and above the hoarse cries of battle beat the torrent, sped the whining wind. The Thunderbird was riding their enemy down, was feeding them to the Under Water People!

Bopo and Olah fought. Suddenly a light craft shot through the rain screen. A sinewy arm came up brandishing a white flint knife. The man behind hurled a tomahawk, but Bopo ducked and it splashed on the other side. Scar-Face and Squint-Eye, their feathers running water and their teeth bared in the war-whoop, were closing in!

And once more the thunder roared. Olah saw Scar-Face pale and shrink back, and Squint-Eye seized a paddle to turn the craft, but too late. From the heavens shot a bolt of dazzling white, many





*Scar-Face and Squint-Eye were closing in.*

times forked, and struck the Sioux craft squarely. The canoe broke into bits, and two limp forms slid into the water.

"Claws of the Thunderbird!" shrieked Olah, "at last they have reached our enemies!"

The storm passed as suddenly as it came. Bopo and Olah were unwounded. And as their canoe glided back to the waiting women, two forms could be distinguished, towed from the stern. Wawena came running.

"Here is the evidence," cried Olah, "that this time these evil ones are dead!" and he pointed to the inert bodies of Scar-Face and Squint-Eye. "I only pricked him in the arm that other night in the storm," he continued, revealing a deep scar on the shoulder of Scar-Face. "The Thunderbird frightened them away that time, and waited until now to finish his work. But it is completed. The men of snakes live no more!"

Wawena turned away with a shudder. Others came and looked, among them one sad-faced woman, Pine Cone. As she gazed at the scarred face of the first body she cried out, throwing her arms wildly into the air.

"At last!" she screamed fiercely, glaring at the features. "At last! You killed my husband, you killed my papoose, and you thought you had killed me! But the Thunderbird gave me wings to fly from you, and put his fire in your path so you dared not follow! And now the same Spirit has stopped forever the beating of your vile heart!"

"What is this?" exclaimed Olah, and Wawena cried, "Are you sure that this is the man who killed your husband so long ago?"

"As certain as there is fire and water and air!" replied Pine Cone. "I could never forget that face. Ever since, it has haunted me in my dreams!"

"Then your daughter is alive!" exploded Olah, and pointed to Wawena.

When everyone had heard the story, and put together the pieces, there could be but one conclusion. Wawena had found her own mother; and Pine Cone had been given her papoose from the grave. It was a happy group that night which sat in the glow of a huge fire and watched the dance of victory, and heard the glorious throbbing of the drum.

\* \* \* \* \*

Olah and Bopo were given great honors in the tribe for what they had done for their people, and were awarded plumed head gear that many a warrior might covet. There was no more fighting during their generation, for their enemies moved farther to the west. Wawena, who became the interpreter for the tribe at the big council which treated for peace, was the envy of all the Chippewa girls, and especially of one named Magpie.

